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EDITORIAL

It's the week after New Year's and I'm trapped in Southern California, courtesy of the weather back East. (Yeah, I know — life's tough.)

I've been immersed in the San Diego/LA lifestyle, and I've come to observe just how vastly different this culture is, especially when compared to that of urban New York. It makes me wonder — how do Californians view a city street soldier like The Punisher? Sure, he's travelled, but the core of his mission lies in the dark, claustrophobic concrete canyons. Yet his popularity stretches nationwide.

Why?

Apparently the essence of the character crosses geographic boundaries so that he can appeal to readers from wide-open Kansas to forested North Carolina to sunny California. And now, as we entertain the possibility that The Punisher may be a woman, a man of African ancestry, or a person from any of a number of cultures, who knows what societal boundaries he or she may break.

Solid concept, and the threat/promise of change — these mark a character who will remain standing while others fall.

What is it about The Punisher that presses (or doesn't press) your buttons? As always, I want your opinions, and if you respond before April 1, you'll receive an individual "thank you" for your efforts. Remember, though — the topic is The Punisher, and no doctoral theses, please!

Have mercy, even if The Punisher wouldn't.

— Steve Saffel
Editor

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Up Front

A MOST INCREDIBLE WEDDING

Rick Jones fans, prepare to heave a heavy sigh — one of the world's most eligible bachelors is about to be taken off of the "available" market. Mr. Jones (of **INCREDIBLE HULK** fame) and his lovely girlfriend Marlo have set a date to tie the knot, get hitched, put on the ol' leg irons. . .

The two plan to be wed this April with an event which boasts a guest list like a veritable *Who's Who* in the super hero crowd. Peter David, who will write the special wedding vows, revealed, "Most weddings we've witnessed where heroes have been in attendance have either been noted for being absolutely unexciting affairs or being the slugfest of the century. But this event will be different. It will thrill and excite everyone who is there, especially if they arrive *before* The Impossible Man gives the couple his thrilling wedding gift.

"Everyone who's *anyone* will be there. . ."

Word also has it that the bachelor bash the Hulk has planned for his long time friend is going to be a doozy. The party — which includes guests Captain America, Iron Man, and The Human Torch — will serve up the usual "last night of freedom" fare, and rumor is that, among all of the party favors, joke gifts, and other bachelor party revelry, there will be a trinket that holds a startling revelation for the groom!

For those who can't attend in person, the bachelor party will be chronicled in **HULK #417** (on sale in March) while the nuptials will be witnessed the following month. As a special bonus, **HULK #418** will sport a gatefold die-cut cover designed to be a replica of the couple's wedding invitation (this version of the issue will be priced at $2.50, while a regular newsstand version of the story will be available at the regular $1.50 price).

Formal evening wear is required.

And for the *ardent* Rick and Marlo fans, this year's **HULK ANNUAL #20**, which will arrive with the June brides, will chronicle the wedding with a revealing look at the *official* wedding album.

BARBIE IN TOYLAND

Photo by Hildy Mesnik

Amanda Conner (left) and Barbara Slate (right) at *FAO Schwarz* in New York City.

On November 20th, the world famous toy store **FAO Schwarz** of New York City brought a legion of parents and children together with stacks of **BARBIE** and **BARBIE FASHION** comics and some of the books' top creative staff for an afternoon of excitement.

Hundreds of young girls came to have their **BARBIE** books signed by **BARBIE FASHION** writer Barbara Slate and artist Amanda Conner. Marvel Editor Hildy Mesnik noted, "The place was mobbed.

"Just to see the look on these young girls' faces as they made the connection between the doll, the books, and the creative people behind them, was a sheer joy," Hildy commented, noting that FAO Schwarz was so pleased with the event's success that they plan to hold similar Barbie parties at other locations, including their stores in Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco.

In all, five such affairs are planned around the country over the next year, and Hildy plans to have a **BARBIE** talent at each event. With the opening of twelve *more* stores in the immediate future, Hildy and FAO Schwarz anticipate lots of opportunity for the writers and artists to meet their fans.

THERE ARE NO SILVER LININGS

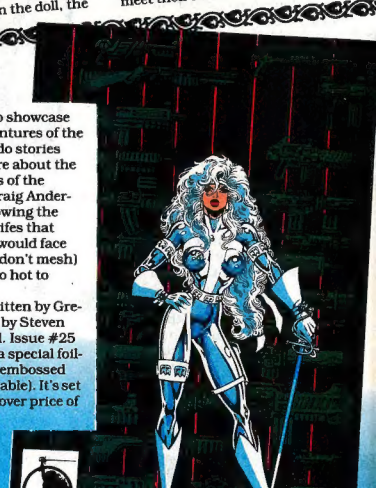
SILVER SABLE #25 reveals the final truth concerning the founder of the legendary Wild Pack.

Silver Sable has been following in her father's footsteps ever since she took over the reins of the super-mercenary group. But in all of the years as the Pack's leader, Sable has held out the hope that her father — presumed assassinated — might still be alive.

But not all resolutions are happy ones, especially when Silver's ex-husband, the crafty hit-man known as The Foreigner, stalks Sable even as *she* mounts an attack on the international terrorist group known as the Genesis Coalition.

SILVER SABLE #25 serves as a turning point for the series. While the title will continue to showcase the action-packed adventures of the Wildpack, "We want to do stories where we can learn more about the interpersonal dynamics of the group," series Editor Craig Anderson noted. "We'll be showing the type of conflicts and strifes that such an eclectic group would face and how they mesh (or don't mesh) when the action gets too hot to handle."

SILVER SABLE is written by Gregory Wright and drawn by Steven Butler and Pam Eklund. Issue #25 is 48-pages and sports a special foil-embossed cover (a non-embossed version will also be available). It's set to ship in April with a cover price of $2.95.



MEASURE OF A MAN

Last summer, the **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL** introduced Annex, a person who made up for the loss of the use of his limbs by donning a new type of powerful armor. This March, Annex will face the personal terror of a bitter criminal who will go to any length to possess that armor in the four-issue **ANNEX** limited series.

Annex will combat the villainy of Brace, another handicapped armor wearer who has turned to crime as a release for his bitterness at his condition. Brace wants the superior Annex armor, hoping that it will turn him into less of a machine and more of a man. During his fight to save himself and his armor, Annex will find he must come to terms with who and what he is. . .or Brace will kill him.

"Annex feels emasculated because of his handicap," series Editor Mark Powers explained, "and he uses the armor as compensation for his condition. But what he needs to learn is that if he allows himself to be bitter and vindictive against the world around him, then he'll be more like the pathetic Brace and less of a man."

ANNEX is written by Jack C. Harris and drawn by Walter McDaniel. Each issue is a standard format 32-page comic book priced at $1.75.

HAUNTED BY SHADOWS

Not all heroes can be trusted.

U.S. Army General Sharpe believes most costumed heroes have their own covert agendas, while government-sponsored groups such as X-Factor are nothing more than mutant dupes of a shortsighted administration.

That's why Sharpe will overstep his mandate to study super heroes and mastermind *Project: Homegrown*, a process through which he can create his own force of super-powered beings. But Homegrown's heroes, known as **Shadowforce One**, are convicted criminals and, when they go rogue, its up to Spider-Man and X-Factor to stop their reign of terror before someone — maybe even a super hero — gets killed.

SPIDER-MAN AND X-FACTOR: SHADOW GAMES is a three-issue limited series beginning in March ($1.75 cover price) that tells the story of what can happen when a person misguidedly thinks he knows what is good for the public, and has the power to carry out *his* agenda. Written by Kurt (**MARVELS**) Busiek and illustrated by Pat (**DOOM 2099**) Broderick with inker Bruce Patterson, **SHADOW GAMES** begins when Shadowforce One is sent by Sharpe to capture Spider-Man so that he can study the web-slinger's biology. But when Shadowforce One goes out of control, only X-Factor can stop the rampage of terror and free Spider-Man.

"**SHADOW GAMES**, believe it or not, started out as a fill-in story for one of the Spider-Man books," Busiek said, "but the story grew so fast in so many different directions that it took on a life of its own. . . . much like the super-beings of Project: Homegrown. And, like Shadowforce One, the series has gone rogue; now we'll just have to wait and see [illegible] body count goes!"

HEAVY METAL ACTION

Lead singer Sebastian Bach of the heavy metal group Skid Row, a self-proclaimed comic book fanatic, recently visited the offices of Marvel Comics to take in the sights and discuss a special comic book that will star his band and some very cosmic Marvel characters.

"Sebastian has been a major comic book fan since he was a kid," Marvel Editor Mort Todd pointed out. "In fact, his father painted a twelve-foot-tall portrait of the Incredible Hulk in Sebastian's room when he was growing up. So when the chance to do a comic book presented itself, he just had to get involved."

Though the book is only in the developmental stage, the Skid Row comic already promises to be a unique rock and comic experience. "The Skid Row book will guest star Marvel characters, and it will follow the band on an adventure of infinite proportions. It will be a real slugfest, I promise you that!" Mort explained.

Skid Row is widely known among music fans for their chart-topping albums, the latest of which is *Slave To The Grind*. Their comic book debut is scheduled for late spring 1994.

Photo © Marti Wilkerson

– Jerry A. Novick

IT'S A MAD MODERN

It comes from Down Under.

First there was Nickelodeon's new animated "Nick Toon," *Rocko's Modern Life*, featuring an insecure Wallabee ("which for those of you who don't know is like a kangaroo," Encyclopedic Editor Mike Lackey revealed), his slobby best friend Heffer, who is a steer, and his precocious, ravenous dog Spunky.

Now comes a hysterical new comic book take on the outrageous import. "It's going to be under the same umbrella as **THE REN AND STIMPY SHOW**. . .We're trying to include different stories, gag pages and games, utilizing all of the characters as they do in **REN AND STIMPY**," Lackey said.

Though it falls under "the umbrella" with Ren and Stimpy, John Lewandowski, one of the series writers, hopes that comparisons aren't made, "just due to the fact that [both properties are] Nickelodeon cartoons."

"It's like apples and oranges," Lewandowski explained. "Two different worlds, two different sets of characters — completely, even with some of Rocko's stuff being visually very *wild*. I mean, we have brains popping out of heads and eyeballs being fried and popping out of heads; sometimes it's a lot more graphic than Ren and Stimpy."

DENTAL TRANSMISSIONS

Lewandowski has three plots in the works for the first few issues of **ROCKO'S MODERN LIFE**. The first we will see has Rocko visiting the dentist for a checkup.

"It was a lot of fun just for the simple fact that everyone has their little 'quoibles' about going to the dentist," Lewandowski said. "It's Rocko, plain and simple by himself. There are so many great visuals in it — some are disgusting — but it's a Code-approved book, so. . .

"I was dying to use the dentist stuff. When the time comes and the book is on the shelves, I'm going to send it to my dentist."

But Lewandowski found that it's Spunky who, in his writing, is becoming the central figure in the stories. "The dog is like the instigator, and he's almost the Lois Lane of all of this, because he gets into trouble, and Rocko and Heffer have to bail him out all the time. I'd say, except for the dentist story, [most] of the stories revolve around him.

"He eats anything; in fact in the second story, Spunky winds up biting a [TV] cable wire and he's able to transmit whatever he sees and hears. So, unknown to his buddies, he's broadcasting all over the globe. Later on, they get into a little trouble because some big conglomerate kind of guy wants to buy the dog so he can make a profit. Of course, it's got a nice little twist of an ending where while he's ranting and raving, and his greed gets broadcast all over the world.

"'. . .sometimes it's a lot more graphic than Ren and Stimpy."

And describing his third story, he revealed, "It [deals] with, once again, Spunky, that overactive dog of Rocko's, eating something that gives him worms. The whole story is just the worms on the inside and the rest of the guys trying to cure him of it. And if you've ever had a dog that has worms, you know it's not a pleasant situation."

"All the stories are geared toward young adults and young adolescents," said Rocko's *other* writer Joey Cavalieri. "They deal with modern life, with a little Rocko spin on it, sort of a reflection of America's foibles."

"The characters are just so unique," Lewandowski added. "It's more or less the world gone askew."

SYNCHRONIZED SPOOFING

Working on a licensed book requires great precision and astute attention to detail. The artist must

keep a consistent look throughout the book to insure the integrity of the animated characters as drawn by their original animation artists. It's often not as easy as it looks.

"Rocko's artist-creators at Nickelodeon go over all of [our] artwork to make sure that each character is drawn precisely," Lackey said. "They look at everything to make sure his nose and even his feet are perfect. When I come back from our meeting, I'm going to have a lot of new style sheets for all of the characters, as well as some fun merchandising materials."

a row are just goofy sight gags. I like to think visually."

"I haven't had difficulty sticking to their guides," Lazellari said. "I jumped at the chance to do the book. John and I both did. We started watching the shows, and really got into it, going back and forth and coming up with some really funny stuff."

Darren Auck, veteran of **WHAT THE?!** and **MARVEL AGE'S** calendar, will also be handling some of the artistic duties on Rocko. "Darren is an infinitely talented guy," Cavalieri said. "Though for now, I'm paired with the equally talented Ed Lazellari."

With the Marvel/Nickelodeon relationship running strong due to the success of the **REN AND STIMPY SHOW** comic book, Lackey hopes that his team ups of John Lewandowski, Joey Cavalieri, Ed Lazellari and Darren Auck will make **ROCKO'S MODERN LIFE** an equally tremendous hit.

along the artwork we have and I know they'll be pleased," Lackey said.

ROCKO'S MODERN LIFE will hit the stands in March as a 32-page monthly at the price of $1.95.

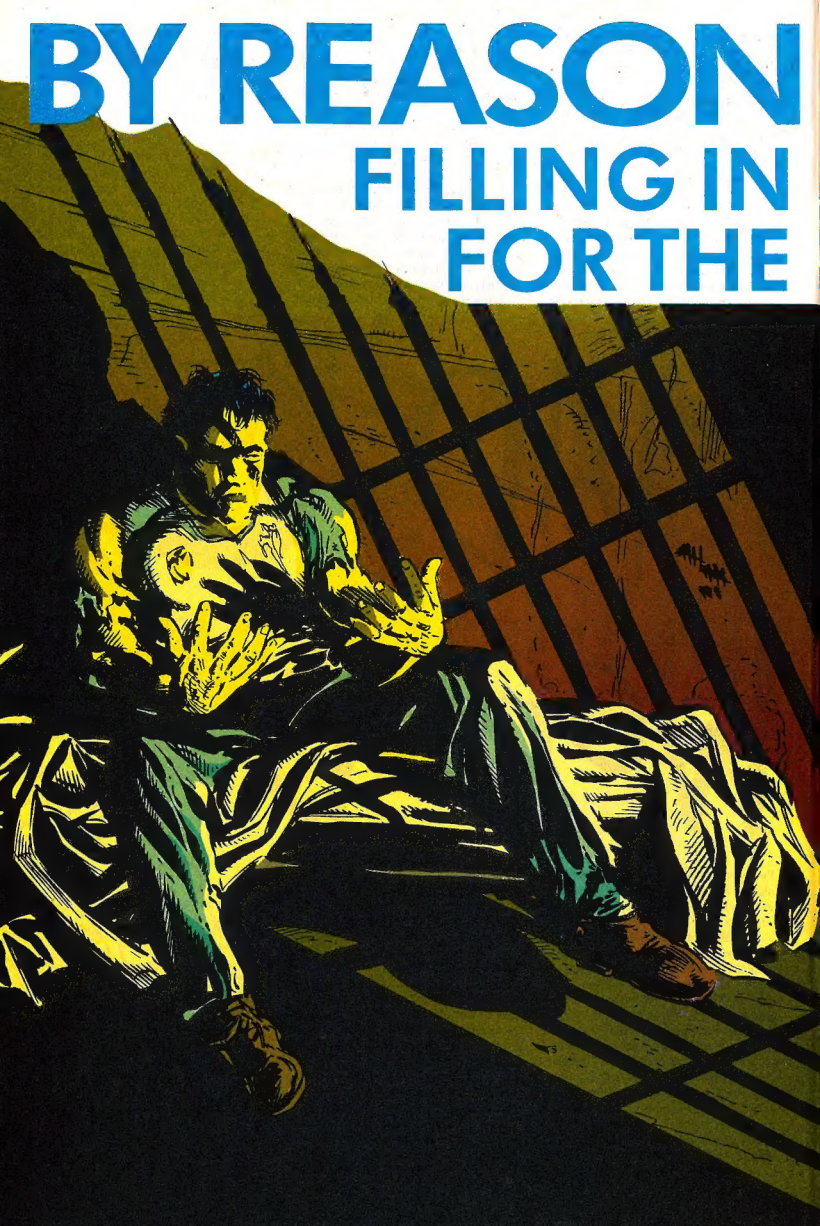
"It's a lot of fun visually. I like to have two pages in each story where I try to put in as many visuals as possible," Lewandowski said. "I have stories where eight or nine panels in

"I'm really pleased with the creative teams. Originally I was going to have set teams, but we decided to switch back and forth between artists and writers. There are so many possibilities with this book and so much fun to be had.

"I'm leaving tomorrow for California — me, [Editor in Chief] Tom DeFalco and [Executive Editor] Carl Potts — for a big meeting with Rocko's creators at Nickelodeon. I'm taking along the artwork we have and I know they'll be pleased," Lackey said.

— *Lia M. Pelosi*

BY REASON OF FILLING IN FOR THE



OF INSANITY

PUNISHER

"Let's face it, The Punisher has a death wish," Punisher Editor Don Daley said, "When Frank Castle's family was shot, something inside him died. Part of his humanity left him and the void was filled by The Punisher persona. He is driven by hatred for criminals of any kind, by a very clear sense of right and wrong, and by a severe case of survivor's guilt."

The Punisher's death wish was nearly carried out in the "Suicide Run" storyline that crossed over into three Punisher titles in late 1993. In the story The Punisher attacked a meeting of the country's top crime lords although he knew it was a trap. The result was quite a few dead crime lords and a destroyed building with The Punisher at the bottom of it, seeming dead to all observers.

But what happens next? Can the Marvel Universe survive without a Punisher? We may never find out because out of the "death" of The Punisher arise not one but seven other Punishers to take his place.

"In a deeply warped and all-too-realistic way, this story makes sense," Daley said, "Were this our world and The Punisher was out there doing what he does, there would be a lot of copycats. So when the Marvel Universe thinks that the Frank Castle Punisher is dead, it's not surprising that there are a lot of people who want to continue his war."

Punisher writer Larry Hama agrees that this storyline reflects the natural state of humanity. "Human nature is to kill — it is only society that holds that killing nature in check. When society removes the mores against killing, then thousands line up to do it. What is war but people putting on costumes in order to justify killing people? So when The Punisher dies and some in society see a perceived need, it's only natural that others come forward to fill the need."

The characters who rise to the occasion cut a wide swath: ex-cops, inventors, criminals, couch potatoes, and bikers — but they all are skewed reflections of the man they are emulating, The Punisher.

"I think what is interesting to me about The Punisher is his existentialism. He is the ultimate emotionless human being. He doesn't feel anything toward the criminals, he just knows they have to be destroyed, and so he does it. It's his job. He does it and he doesn't care at all what anyone thinks," said Steven Grant, current writer of **THE PUNISHER**.

HITMAN

Grant feels this detachment is also reflected in one of the replacement Punishers, Jimmy Pierce, also known as The Hitman.

"Jimmy Pierce displays a lot of the disinterest and detachment that can be seen in the original Punisher. He's a small-time hood who is kind of the black sheep of a black family. Jimmy is part of the Cullen crime family in Chicago, but he's never really cared about it. In fact, when he was old enough, he up and left. He wandered the country living on the fringes of the law, but never really breaking it. Then his family drags him back in and forces him to become the Cullens' personal Punisher. They feel, if the underworld thinks The Punisher is working for the Cullens, the other gangs will give in to them.

"Jimmy doesn't want to be The Punisher though. He wants to be left alone. In the end he's blackmailed into doing the job for his uncle but, like the original Punisher, he looks at it as a job, nothing more," Grant said.

THE YUPPINISHER

The other substitute Punisher that Grant is focusing on is Dean Swaybrick, The Yuppunisher.

"The problem is his lack of morals."

Dean Swaybrick is The Punisher as seen through a fun house mirror. Like The Punisher, Swaybrick is out to make the world a better place. However, Swaybrick wants to make it a better place for himself. He is a young urban professional who exhibits all of the bad connotations of the word "Yuppie."

"The Yuppunisher is The Punisher without the moral code. He is conniving and deceitful and, although he serves the same social function as The Punisher, his motives are highly questionable. Dean wants to use The Punisher's high profile to his own advantage," Grant said.

Daley added that the Yuppunisher is similar to the original Punisher in his "whatever it takes" attitude. "In his own way, Dean Swaybrick is just as driven as The Punisher. The problem is his lack of morals. He is willing to take innocent lives in order to make himself look good. The Punisher would never do that."

As the storyline continues, Dean Swaybrick will show himself to be a master manipulator as he arranges for television crews to follow on his adventures and continues to make the original Punisher a hero in the eyes of the public.

"Swaybrick has been planning this for a long time. He has had a biography of The Punisher sitting in a vault, waiting for Frank Castle's death. He wants to use The Punisher's reputation to propel himself into the spotlight. Of course what he doesn't realize is that he is on a collision course with several *other* characters not the least of which is the original Punisher — who is very much alive and not at all amused by the Yuppunisher," Grant said.

PAYBACK

One of the characters who will also cause problems for Dean Swaybrick is Payback, a rather unwilling Punisher substitute.

Payback is Eddie Dyson, an honest cop who, on The Punisher's advice, testified against fellow officers. Dyson's family was killed by the dirty cops he testified against and he blamed The Punisher for their deaths. However, after doing more investigating as Payback, Dyson realized who the real killers were and destroyed them.

"Eddie Dyson thought he was done with the vigilante business," said Chuck Dixon, writer of **PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL**. "He got the satisfaction that Frank Castle never did. He destroyed his family's killers. What he didn't count on was **V.I.G.I.L.** [the anti-vigilante, government-sponsored task force] hunting him down for his actions."

"Payback is The Punisher without the drive," said Daley. "His family was killed and he still feels remorse over it but, unlike The Punisher, he's come to terms with it. He no longer feels the need for vengeance and he just wants to be left alone. But when **V.I.G.I.L.** comes knocking at his door, he's forced to go on the run and take up the Payback persona again.

"Payback comes from the same place as The Punisher, but he's taken a different road. He's similar in his background and origins, but different in his reluctance. Where The Punisher views his crusade as a job, Payback views it as a burden, one he would rather not have."

"Desmond is a postal worker with a hand gun fetish."

PHALANX

Another character whose origins are similar to The Punisher is Phalanx, who was created by Chuck Dixon.

Another slightly tilted version of the vigilante, Phalanx is Dick Johnson, an inventor who created an armor that works on rapid displacement theory. Johnson thought he was developing it for the government, but it turned out he was fooled and was actually developing it for the mob. He decided to stop working on the designs, and quit until the mob threatened his wife and child.

As Phalanx, Johnson used the armor to destroy part of the mob, but others are still after him and are willing to kill his family to get to him. Because of this he has told his wife he is leaving her for another woman, giving her the house and all their savings. He first appeared in **PUNISHER WAR ZONE ANNUAL #1**.

"Phalanx and The Punisher are similar in their shared loss. This is another character who has experienced the loss of his family, but in some ways Phalanx's loss is more tragic because he chose the separation himself. Frank Castle had no

control in the loss of his family, despite what he may think. Dick Johnson lost his family because of something he did, and he resents the hell out of it. He wants to take out his loss on every criminal in hopes of someday being able to rejoin his family," Dixon said.

"Phalanx is a peaceful guy forced to become violent by his situation," Daley elaborated. "He's a scientist, so he is extremely logical and tends to see things in black-and-white, much like The Punisher, and yet he has a compassion that [for The Punisher] died with Frank Castle's family."

LYNN MICHAELS

"Lynn Michaels shares The Punisher's drive. She has a very clear idea of what must be done and how to get there. She is an ex-cop who is disillusioned with the system and is infatuated by The Punisher's effectiveness. When she learns of Frank Castle's death she sets out to take his place," Daley said.

Lynn Michaels brings an even more interesting spin to The Punisher archetype in that she is not the emotionless automaton that The Punisher is, as are many of his replacements.

"Lynn is disillusioned. She feels that the system is completely co-opted and there is nothing that can be done about it from within. That's why she got out of the system," Dixon said. "But unlike Frank Castle, she is emotional about what she does. She feels guilt. She feels pain. She feels pleasure. This causes her to have reactions to what she does. This causes her problems that The Punisher never had. Her emotions also got her into trouble because she felt an attraction to Frank Castle, so the loss that she is driven by is [the loss of] The Punisher."

OUTLAW

Outlaw is also driven by The Punisher's death. He is Nigel, a British messenger who idolizes Frank Castle. When he learned of The Punisher's death he felt he must come to America and avenge his hero.

"Outlaw is a Punisher fan. He is also a biker and a gun nut who thinks it would be a kick to do what The Punisher does. He has none of the grimness that The Punisher has — he's happy-go-lucky and free-wheeling. These really aren't the prime characteristics for someone in The Punisher's line of work, but he has the skills to keep himself alive," Daley said.

"Outlaw is fulfilling a dream by *becoming* The Punisher," Hama said. "(Legendary comic book artist) Wally Wood once told me that a fan is someone who wants to be you, but subconsciously rationalizes that, for them to become you, you must first die. Outlaw is following his fanaticism for The Punisher to its logical end."

"Of all the replacement Punishers, Outlaw is the diametric opposite of The Punisher," Dixon said.

IDIOT PUNISHER

If Outlaw is the diametric opposite of The Punisher, then Desmond Kline isn't even on the same chart. Also known as the Idiot Punisher, Desmond Kline's story most reflects what would happen in the real world.

"Desmond is a postal worker with a handgun fetish," Daley said. "He's an out-of-shape couch potato whose theory is 'somebody has to do the job, why not me?'"

Kline hits the streets in his makeshift Punisher outfit and finds out why only trained individuals should be doing this job. "I'm looking at this story as 'What if Tom Arnold Were The Punisher,'" Dixon explained. "This is a story that is ripe with humor. Kline couldn't be further from The Punisher. He has an extremely distorted view of the world and his place in it. Kline's grip on reality is loose to say the least. What happens to the Idiot Punisher is what would happen in the real world."

The saga of the replacement Punishers has already begun and will be running through all three Punisher series (particularly **THE PUNISHER** and **THE PUNISHER WAR ZONE**) until the surviving candidate is announced next month in the flagship title.

— Randy Meredith

Writer Larry Hama

WRITING THE TOUGH GUYS: CHUCK DIXON ON HARD BOILED COMICS

It was a cold and cloudy November afternoon when I caught up with Chuck Dixon. My editor had assigned me an article on hard-boiled comics, and the word on the street was that when it came to writing about tough guys there were none better. Dixon has written them all. The Punisher, Wolverine, Batman, Jugger Grimrod, Lawdog — if they're hard as nails, Dixon can get inside their heads. He's the Beau LaDuke of ractonteurs.

"Hard-boiled comics are where my talent seems to lie," Dixon said. "I'm most comfortable writing about tough guys. I've tried writing things like horror, and I can't do it — I just don't get it."

I asked Dixon what the key elements were in writing tough guys.

"The most important element of hard-boiled fiction is brevity." Dixon said. "These characters are never verbose. They say very little, but observe everything. Hard-boiled heroes' speech patterns are very choppy. They speak in short bursts. If you look at any Punisher script that I've written, you'll see that The Punisher's lines are very short and to the point."

Dixon noted that the second element of the hard-boiled genre is a reactive hero.

"A hard-boiled hero is never in control of his own life. He's a victim who's caught up in extenuating circumstances. To be perfectly honest, the hard-boiled hero is a loser. I think that that's what makes the genre so popular with Americans. We can relate to this poor schlub whose life is out of control," Dixon said.

He cited The Punisher as a good example of the reactive hero.

"The Punisher's entire existence is a reaction to one tragic event in his life," Dixon said. "He is constantly trying to atone for his family's death. Because of that he's not in control of his own life. Each Punisher story makes him a little more tragic."

Dixon's final point on writing hard-boiled fiction was to note the writer's task of creating a character devoid of emotions.

"A stoic attitude is the trademark of a hard-boiled hero. He doesn't seem to have an emotional reaction to anything. An offshoot of this emotionlessness is that the character can make the off-the-cuff remarks that are the trademark of the genre. In the case of The Punisher, when he makes a joke he hardly realizes it. That's why he's fun to write," Dixon said.

So that's all there is to hard-boiled fiction? Brevity and a reactive hero devoid of emotions?

"Like all great genres," Dixon said, "hard-boiled fiction is really simple. Either you get it or you don't."

– Randy Meredith

HEMBECK

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD!

IN THE WAKE OF THE UPCOMING ANNIVERSARY EDITIONS REVIVING THE CLASSIC SPLIT BOOKS FROM THE DAWN OF THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS, *SHOCKING DOCUMENTS* HAVE BEEN UNCOVERED.

THE UNINITIATED MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THESE MAGAZINES WEREN'T *ALWAYS* SPLIT BETWEEN TWO CHARACTERS. IRON MAN APPEARED IN 19 ISSUES OF Tales of SUSPENSE BEFORE HIS BATTLE WITH CAPTAIN AMERICA IN #58. THEN THE LIVING LEGEND OF WORLD WAR TWO GOT HIS VERY OWN SERIES AS OF ISSUE 59. SIMILARLY, WHETHER ANT-MAN *OR* GIANT MAN, HANK PYM HEADLINED 25 ISSUES of Tales to ASTONISH BEFORE HIS FRACAS WITH THE INCREDIBLE HULK IN ISSUE 59 LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR SHARING THE BOOK WITH THE JADE GIANT (BEGINNING WITH #60).

INSIDE THOSE HALCYON PAGES, THE BANTER DURING THE BATTLES WAS PRETTY MUCH WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT, BUT *WHAT* WAS BEING SAID ON THOSE HERETOFORE WORDLESS COVER CLASHES? (REPRODUCED HERE AS HEMBECK FACSIMILES OF THE JACK KIRBY ORIGINALS).

REVEALED NOW FOR THE *FIRST TIME EVER*, THE *ACTUAL* CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE SPARRING OPPONENTS!

GET OUT OF Tales of SUSPENSE, YOU STAR SPANGLED SNEAK-- IT'S **MY** BOOK!

CALM DOWN, AVENGER. I--

"AVENGER"--THAT WAS OUR *FIRST* MISTAKE! WE SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE LET YOU JOIN!

LOOK, FRIEND, BACK IN THE FORTIES, I HAD MY OWN BOOK, BUT FOR NOW I'M CONTENT TO SHA--

YOUR OWN BOOK!??

SO *THAT'S* WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT! BLAST THE DAY YOUR ICEBERG FLOATED OUR WA-- *AH! AH! MY WEAK HEART! I THINK THIS IS--- ARRRGGHH!*

..IRON MAN?.. IRON MAN ..ARE YOU ALRIGHT?

GEE, MAYBE I'LL BE GETTING MY OWN BOOK SOONER THAN I THOUGHT...

HULK WANT *IN* TO Tales to ASTONISH!

YOU ALREADY *HAD* YOUR OWN TITLE--SIX ISSUES AND YOU WERE CANCELLED, PAL!

HULK CANCEL **YOU**, PYM!

NOT LIKELY, LETTUCE HEAD. I'LL BE HERE *LONG AFTER* YOU'VE **BOMBED** OUT AGAIN.

PYM MAKING HULK **MAD!** ONCE IN HULK REPLACE BIG DOPE WITH SOMEONE MIGHTIER, MEANER, *BETTER*-- LIKE SUB-MARINER.

THAT COLD FISH?? Hah!! GUESS THIS MEANS I SHOULD BE *WORRIED*, eh HULK?

COUNT ON IT, MR. HIGH BUT NOT SO MIGHTY, *COUNT ON IT.*

POSTSCRIPT: IRON MAN RECOVERED--IT WAS ONLY A MILD INFARCTION--AND SHARED Tales of SUSPENSE WITH CAP FOR 41 ISSUES BEFORE THEY WERE BOTH AWARDED THEIR OWN BOOK LENGTH TITLES. GIANT MAN, HOWEVER, COHABITED Tales to ASTONISH WITH THE HULK FOR A SCANT TEN ISSUES BEFORE SURE ENOUGH, PRINCE NAMOR REPLACED HIM (SUBBY LATER RECEIVED HIS OWN SOLO BOOK, AS DID THE GRUMPY GREEN GIANT). HENRY PYM, THOUGH AN OCCASSIONAL AVENGER, HAS *NEVER* STARRED IN A SUCCESSFUL SOLO SERIES SINCE! HULK HAVE *LAST* GUFFAW!!

FLEER

Marvel Comics provides the soldiers while Fleer Corporation directs the battle in a revolution that will transform the face of the trading card war that has in recent years erupted among the various comic book companies.

The coming months will see the release of no fewer than *five* all-new trading card sets by Marvel and Fleer in their opening salvo. The year-long blockbuster line-up includes a high-quality, high-profile *X-Men* card set, a special in-depth look at *Spider-Man*, a comprehensive *Marvel Universe* set, a lavishly painted *Marvel Masterpieces* set, and a release designed around a never-before-seen concept in comics trading cards.

WHEN GIANTS COMBINE

Until recently, comics companies and cards companies competed with one another for the entertainment dollars Then, seemingly overnight, entertainment businesses began to realize the synergy that could be generated by encouraging consumers to expand and combine their diverse interests. Perhaps the most visible example of this has been the recent marriage of comic book publishers and trading card manufacturers, two industries that tried their hands at joint ventures in the late 1960s and early '70s, only to retreat to their respective territories after luke-warm success.

Four years ago, Marvel Comics saw the vast potential to entertain their fans in a new, exciting way and teamed with Impel/Skybox to release the first *Marvel Universe* trading card set. Seeing the popularity of comic book trading cards skyrocket over the intervening years, Marvel decided it was time to forge an even tighter alliance with a company that was constantly breaking new ground in the trading card industry. Thus, the 1993 partnership of Fleer Corporation and Marvel Comics came to pass.

The first bit of business to be ironed out between the two entertainment giants was how best to combine their individual specialties. Marvel's obvious contribution would be their great pantheon of characters and the creative fire behind them, while Fleer would bring to the table their knowledge of how trading cards are made and their uncanny knack for making each new set of cards unique.

Marvel Editor Tom Brevoort, who edits each set of comic book cards produced by Fleer, explained how the process works: "Essentially, Marvel controls the editorial content of the set. We come up with the initial checklist of what characters, events, etc., we think should be included in the set. This then goes to Fleer, where they put a lot of thought into the printing and production of the cards. They suggest what sort of treatment the set should get — will it be an Ultra set, what sort of foil stamping it should have — as well as how the 'chase card' subsets will be presented [a chase card is a randomly packed special card, like a hologram or prism card, that is available only in limited numbers]. Because the card market is so competitive, Fleer is always looking for new ways to make a set stand out from all the other ones produced."

From there, the process moves back to Marvel, where the editorial nuts and bolts start turning. "Once Fleer decides what type of treatment the set will get," Marvel Executive Editor Bob Budiansky explained, "we begin to coordinate the set and put the actual cards together. Artists are lined up to draw or paint the art and the text is written. During all of this, however, we remain in close contact with Fleer. We'll provide them with materials for marketing and promotion and they'll give us feedback on how the cards fit their production needs."

THE BEST BY DESIGN

Tom Brevoort pointed out that Fleer's involvement helps with the editorial side of a card set. "Fleer and Marvel get together with the set's overall designer — in the case of the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* sets this is Arnie Sawyer, who designed several sets for Marvel in the past, including two of the previous *Marvel Universe* sets — to make decisions about how the set will look as a whole," he said. "Fleer decides, from a production standpoint, how the cards will be cut as they roll off the presses, which influences (and is influenced by) what cards go where in the set. This helps us figure out how the cards go together in the standard nine-card binder sheet, and how to lay out things like two-card 'Arch-Enemy Cards' or 'Battle Cards.'"

From Fleer's point of view, these are important decisions because they affect how the cards are cut during manufacturing. There are two types of cuts used in producing a set of trading cards. With a standard single cut, the cutting blade comes down only once, so the edges of each card need to line up exactly with the cards next to it. These cards usually have common border designs, as with last year's *X-Men Series II* set.

The other type of cut, called a double-cut, uses the cutting blade twice, so instead of one cut causing two cards to separate, it takes two cuts per side to separate each individual card from the sheet. Thus, with double-cut sets, artwork can bleed all the way to the card's border, a technique often used in painted sets such as *Marvel Masterpieces*.

"...Fleer is always looking for new ways to make a set stand out..."

Ultimately, all of these decisions made by Marvel and by Fleer will lead to what editors, designers, manufacturers, and especially fans and collectors, hope will be the best trading cards ever produced. Fleer has already broken ground in the world of sports cards with their *Ultra Basketball* set and has caused a collector's frenzy with the special chase cards with which they pepper their baseball and football trading card sets.

And Marvel, for their part, plans to bring their best characters and most talented creators to each and every set produced.

– *Jerry A. Novick*

NEW FOR '94:
FIVE SETS READY FOR ACTION

Here is a rundown of the five trading card sets that Marvel and Fleer have in the works for the next year:

ULTRA X-MEN: The world's most popular mutants gathered together in January to help Fleer and Marvel kick off their partnership in grand style! This fully-painted 150-card set was given Fleer's *Ultra* treatment; each card features metallic foil stamping and is protected with a special UV-coating. Artists for the set include Dave Dorman, Bill Sienkiewicz, Glenn Fabry, Jim Steranko, and Daniel Brereton.

Included in the card count is a special triptych set depicting the wedding of Jean Grey and Scott "Cyclops" Summers, and there are two separate chase card sets. One 9-card chase set with special foil stamping features the painted artwork of renowned fantasy artists The Brothers Hildebrandt and is designed to fit together to form one large poster.

The second is what Fleer is calling a "Power Blast" set — a six-card foil-etched set produced by artist Lou Harrison. This subset depicts the events of the monumental "Fatal Attractions" storyline that appeared in various mutant books during the X-Men's Thirtieth Anniversary.

The **ULTRA X-MEN** Trading Cards are available now.

From the first Marvel/Fleer set—*Ultra X-Men*

Mark Bagley artwork from Fleer's new Amazing Spider-Man card set

SPIDER-MAN: The *Spider-Man* trading card set will be a 150-card set featuring all-new art by Spidey penciler Mark Bagley, inked by Mark Farmer, Terry Austin, Randy Emberlin, Adam Hughes, Dick Giordano, and many more. Most of the cards in this unique set will fit into 9-card poster-like subsets. One of the many special features of this set will be how the text will be written for the back of each card. Marvel Special Projects Assistant Editor Glenn Greenberg explained the concept: "Various cards will be presented from different Spider-Man characters' perspectives. Some will be done in the witty-yet-insightful tone of Spidey himself, others will read as if they were written for an article in The Daily Bugle, and some will be done from the twisted point of view of Eddie Brock/Venom. This will really keep with the tone of how the comic book has been done over the years, and will make this set a unique trading card collecting experience."

Special sub-catagories for the *Spider-Man* trading card set include "Spider-Man's Origin," "Venom," "Spidey's Greatest Battles," and "Peter Parker's Friends." Look for the *Spider-Man* trading cards in March.

Sketches for *Marvel Masterpieces* '94 by the famed fantasy artists the Brothers Hildebrandt

MARVEL UNIVERSE 1994: While details for this set are still in the planning stage, like the *Marvel Universe* sets of the past, this one will feature *all* of the major characters, mysteries, and events that recently had an impact on the Marvel Universe.

MARVEL MASTERPIECES 1994: The all-new 150-card *Marvel Masterpieces 1994* set is tentatively planned to be hand-painted by The Brothers Hildebrandt, famed for their fantasy art on novels, posters, and calendars depicting such famous subjects as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*. The set will feature current as well as classic Marvel characters. Fleer is currently cooking up a special treatment for this set which will make it stand out, but details are being kept under wraps. The release date is also to be announced.

Sample of the new technique that will be used for the *Marvel Chronicles* set

THE MARVEL CHRONICLES: *The Marvel Chronicles* is the working title for a new concept in trading card sets, just recently conceived by the designers and editors at Fleer and Marvel. This 250-card set will depict the major players and events of the Marvel Universe since its birth more than thirty years ago. It will utilize classic comic book art, and each piece will be treated with a special "top-secret" high-tech art enhancement process that will make each piece as unique as if it were brand new, Bob Budiansky hinted. The hope is that *The Marvel Chronicles* set will become a yearly release, with each subsequent set depicting the major events of the year previous. *The Marvel Chronicles* is currently scheduled for a summer 1994 debut.

– *Jerry A. Novick*

Maximum Impact

Heroes come in many forms and, once again, Marvel will reaffirm this fact in March of 1994 with the **HULK VS. VENOM SPECIAL EDITION** from the creative team of writer Peter David and artist Jim Craig. The newest installment in Marvel's series of custom comics will benefit the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (**NCPCA**) as part of a continuing, decade-long relationship between Marvel and the noteworthy organization.

Marvel president and NCPCA board member Terry Stewart stated that the goal of this project is two-fold: "It's a way for Marvel to give something back to the people — specifically the children — who have given so much to us, as well as an opportunity to show the general public that comics can also be educational and socially relevant." Hopes run high for the project, he said, especially in the wake of last year's charitable success, **THE TRIAL OF VENOM**, which was also created by Peter David and Jim Craig. According to custom comics Editor Glenn Herdling, "We sold about 120,000 copies [of **TRIAL**] for **UNICEF** and we're hoping to do the same, if not more [with **HULK VS. VENOM**], this time around."

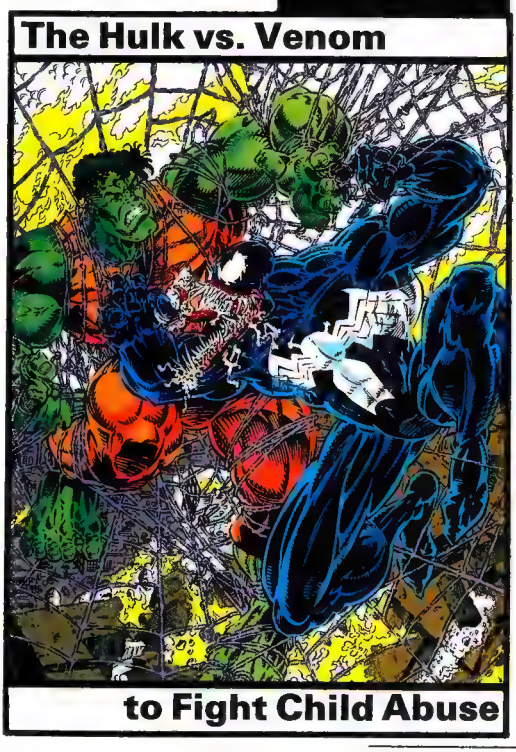
Sales expectations are similar for this endeavor, as is the approach to its creation, Herdling noted: "We don't want to get preachy about child abuse. It makes sense that, if someone is buying the comic, it's because they want to help fight child abuse, but we want them to enjoy what they're reading as well. This way, you can reach a wider audience and have a greater impact on more people."

Herdling also cited the desire to keep this issue within the Marvel Universe as a guiding factor in the story's plotting. "Peter [David wanted to do a story where the Hulk runs into Venom — literally," he explained, adding, "We all wanted this to genuinely be the first meeting of these two *major* characters within the Marvel Universe, and not be forgotten in the future just because it took place outside of continuity. This way, when readers refer back to this event, they'll know it took place here."

The tale is set in San Francisco, where the enigmatic Dr. Bad Vibes is threatening to level the Bay City using his devastating earthquake machine. With this peril lying beneath the city's terrestrial foundations, it's up to ol' green-skin and the ever-salivating symbiote to rout the bad guy and save the city before all is laid to waste. That is, of course, after they duke it out in the classic Marvel style.

The comic, available for $5.00 per copy (or more, at the buyer's discretion), will feature an embossed logo and metallic foil on the cover. Consumers interested in supporting the battle against child abuse will be able to order their own copies of **HULK VS. VENOM** by mailing the coupons carried in selected Marvel comics with March, April, and May 1994 cover dates. In order to expand distribution and awareness, coupons will also be offered to comic book stores for their customers.

— Benjamin Raab



Strange, suspenseful
TALES TO ASTONISH

The Hulk, Captain America, Iron Man, Dr. Strange, The Human Torch, The Thing, Nick Fury.

These characters have raised a sense of wonder in readers ranging from five to thirty-five. What separates the first generation of Marvel fans from younger ones is that the elder ones experienced *firsthand* **TALES OF SUSPENSE #39** (March 1963), when Tony Stark built his first **IRON MAN** suit of armor in the jungles of Vietnam. They saw Dr. Strange pop up as a one-time-only guest-star in **STRANGE TALES #110** (July 1963), only to become a regular in **STRANGE**'s pages very soon thereafter. And they cheered on the Hulk's earliest adventures in **TALES TO ASTONISH.**

Now all can share that thrill as Marvel Comics continues its 30th anniversary celebrations with special *painted* one-shot editions of these three seminal titles. In late spring The Hulk, Professor Henry (Ant Man) Pym, and the Wasp battle a villain empowered by the dagger of Loki in an all-new, updated, contemporary and action-packed **TALES TO ASTONISH** written by Peter David and painted by hot newcomer John Estes *(Streets)*.

Then Iron Man and Captain America deal with nasty reminders of their pasts in **TALES OF SUSPENSE** courtesy of James Robinson *(Golden Age, Firearm, Ultraverse)* and Scotsman Colin MacNeil *(Judge Dredd)*.

Finally, The Human Torch, The Thing, and Dr. Strange spin eccentric yarns and battle monsters of the mind in a very, *very* **STRANGE TALES** thanks to Kurt Busiek (**MARVELS**) and Ricardo Villagran.

"I wanted to produce editorial material that would reflect a *different* approach to Marvel Universe characters and thought a great idea would be to do anniversary painted projects of the split format books," said Editor Fabian Nicieza, initiator of the project. "I wanted to do the traditional strong characters who formed the foundation of the Marvel Universe in the '60s, and Tom [DeFalco] loved the idea."

The three provocatively titled books actually originated in the late 1950s as science fiction and monster tale anthologies drawn by such legendary artists as the inimitable Steve Ditko, Joe Maneely, Jack Kirby, Bill Everett, and Don Heck. By 1962, Stan Lee was refurbishing them as a venue to allow his newly launched super heroes to have solo and team-up adventures and to showcase the origins of new heroes.

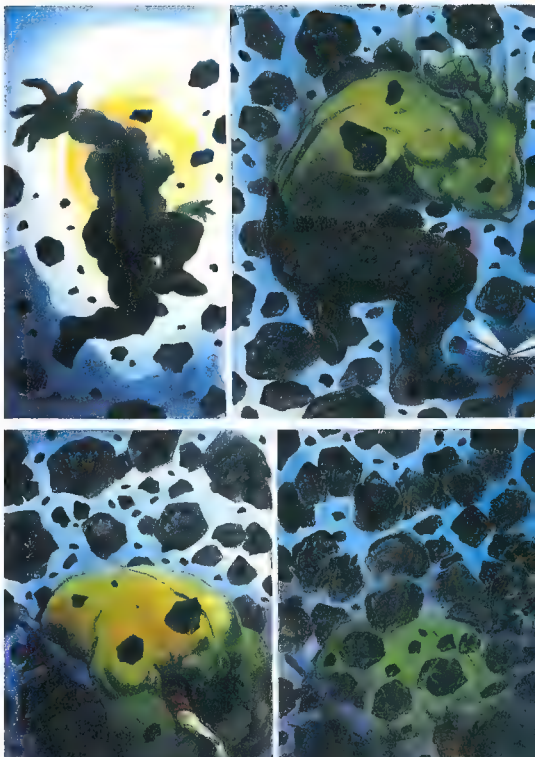
"A lot of it was just gut instinct with the artists."

According to Nicieza, he made a "hit list" of creators and started calling. Not all his first choices were available, but he lucked out with what he felt was a innovative combination of both young and veteran talent.

"Peter David naturally was my first choice for the Hulk," Nicieza said, for example. "As for John Estes, he sent in some painted samples that were incredible. A lot of it was just gut instinct with the artists." Nicieza wanted to keep editorial guidelines simple to allow the creative teams leeway to concentrate just on coming up with great stories.

"What I wanted was a present-day adventure featuring the characters in a team-up story," he said. "I wanted it to be intelligent, thought-provoking and to have strong conflict. I wanted it to reflect some sense of history and for the writers to evoke a real sense of nostalgia — a fondness for that original work that brought them into the game.

"With the painted artists, I also wanted a sense of the tradition and adventure of the original books. Many painted projects, depending on the format and the subject matter, can be a little, let's say, difficult to decipher. I didn't want that. I wanted something very clean, very straightforward, and very accessible. It's tough to translate Kirby into



paint, but that's what I wanted them to try to do."

As for the details of each special:

TALES TO ASTONISH

A mountain range is falling upon Dr. Henry Pym and the Wasp. They are faced with certain death when suddenly a large green figure descends with his back to the sun.

"I was trying to evoke those times when having characters get together would be something really sensational," offered Peter David. "Now it happens all the time. It's not like the days when the Angel did a guest shot in **IRON MAN** and there was a little blurb saying 'by special arrangement with the publishers of X-MEN.' As a reader, you look at that and say 'Oh, wow, this is really special.'"

Coming up with a logic for teaming Pym, The Wasp, and The Hulk in present continuity might seem difficult at first glance, but for David, it was as easy as going back to the first villain they battled as a group in AVENGERS #1 — "Loki the God of Mischief and Evil." It also gave him a chance to indulge his love of Norse mythology. The only catch — in present continuity, Loki is out of commission. David solved the problem by offering a dark twist on the origin of another classic Marvel super hero, Thor.

"I have a character who is essentially a serial killer whose crimes are recreations of some of the bloodier, more intense stories in Norse mythology," explained David. "This guy winds up getting his hands on an

enchanted dagger that possesses Loki's magic and spirit in much the way that the hammer that Don Blake discovered was supposed to possess those qualities that originally belonged to the mighty Thor. It is up to the Hulk, Pym and the Wasp to stop him from destroying, today Norway — and then tomorrow the world."

The Norse mythology and Norwegian landscape also provided painter John Estes with some exciting challenges. Among his favorites: he cited

"The more special effects, the better..."

fight scenes between the Hulk and such classic mythological monsters as the Fenris Wolf and the Midgard Serpent, the descent of an untimely and harrowing "Fimbiewinter" on Oslo, and a giant palace made of ice.

"The more special effects, the better — like fire and ice," Estes said. "Paint conveys special effects better. You can really, really push the color. In line books, you are always trying to delineate things; the color just acts to offset. It was really neat to do that contrast between fire and ice as the palace burns in that winter climate."

TALES OF SUSPENSE

When James Robinson was growing up in London in the 1960s, Marvel Comics titles arrived a few months later than they appeared in the United States. But like any American kid, he learned to read on comic books and one of the Englishman's favorite characters was Captain America. To write his **TALES OF SUSPENSE** tribute, therefore, he decided to hunt up some loose ends still hanging around from Tony Stark's Iron Man origin, and from the sleeper technology that caused so much trouble for Cap back then — the kind of things an ambitious international terrorist group could still use to cause a lot of trouble today.

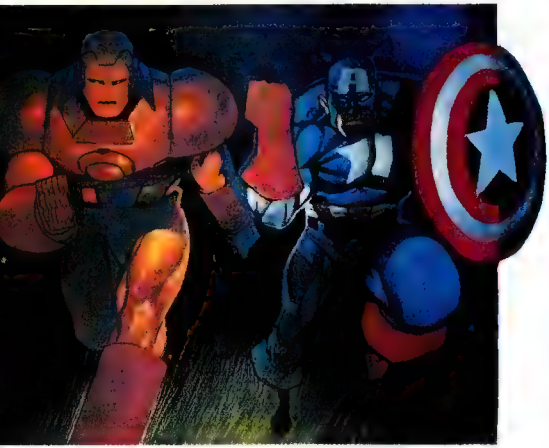
"I tried to come up with a story that touched upon all the **TALES OF SUSPENSE** elements that I used to find so appealing when I was a boy," he said. "Basically, all those old ghosts come back to haunt Captain America and Iron Man separately — data that they should have destroyed. I also included Nick Fury, because he was always guest-starring."

The first third of the book echoes the old split format in that Captain America and Iron Man follow separate storylines, only this time the storylines run concurrently on the top and bottom halves of the same pages. Then the storylines merge, allowing Robinson to explore basic thematic issues between his two lead characters.

"The subtitle is 'Men and Machines,' and it really deals with Tony Stark and Captain America and how [each feels] the other is superior in many ways," he added. "Captain America feels that Iron Man is a superior crime-fighting being, whereas Tony Stark, who feels very flawed within his metal shell, sees Captain America as the epitome of masculinity or humanity. Through their thoughts, we'll see the dichotomy and parallel of, not envy, but a sort of longing to be something better in both men. And the whole 'Men or Machines' motif goes on in that the terrorist threat that they are dealing with is a very robotic, androidic, mechanical threat."

About artist Colin MacNeil, Robinson noted that he is currently the second most popular artist on Great Britain's most popular comic book series, **JUDGE DREDD**. "What I like about Colin's work is that, unlike a lot of painted artists, his work tends to be very crisp and have a very clean, linear look to it, despite the fact that there's a lot of color technique involved."

"Eventually, there's a big glorious, bloody finale."



Finally, Robinson said he hoped the globe-trotting tale, which climaxes in Washington, D.C., provides a quintessential **TALE OF SUSPENSE**. "There's a puzzle within a puzzle, and you slowly get all of the answers and clues planted," he added. "Eventually, there's a big, glorious, bloody finale. There's a lot of intrigue that the worlds of **SHIELD** and international terrorism lend to the story. I genuinely hope this is a tale of suspense."

STRANGE TALES

While working on **MARVELS**, Kurt Busiek had to become an expert on the origins of the Marvel Universe. Now, with another painted title, **STRANGE TALES**, he has gotten the opportunity to play with some of the same characters and their history in much more odd territory.

"Fabian told me he wanted me to do a Dr. Strange/Human Torch/

Thing story with a guest appearance by Nick Fury," he recalled. "The first thought I had was that those guys don't go together. So I played around with the idea of 'Strange Tales.'"

In other words, Nick Fury, the Thing, the Human Torch, and another character sit around playing poker and swapping stories.

"It's all about storytelling and the kind of power we create when we believe in a story that isn't true," Busiek said. "Nick Fury tells a tale that happened to him during the Jim Steranko era that was the heyday of his run in **STRANGE TALES.** Then Ben Grimm goes, 'That ain't nothing, let me tell you what happened to me and the Torchy last week.'"

Ben Grimm's tale provides the "meat" of the adventure — that begins when he and The Torch visit Wyatt Wingfoot on the Kwiasi Indian reservation to investigate a bedtime story Bogeyman-type monster come to life. Dr. Strange arrives, and The Torch launches into *his* story within the story, relating how he and the Thing had battled an alligator monster in the New York sewers early in their careers. Dr. Strange has his own tale, and so does Wyatt Wingfoot, who evokes the pre-super hero days of **STRANGE TALES.**

"I would do an **ORGO** monthly series if I could."

"The monster that we bring back is named Orgo the Unconquerable, and he looks like a gigantic, scaly red fireplug with pie-plate eyes," Busiek added. "He originally appeared in **STRANGE TALES #90,** and is one of the stupidest-looking Kirby monsters ever. I would do an ORGO monthly series if I could."

A final thrill for Busiek was getting Villagran to provide artwork for his writing.

"I think that Ricardo is an absolutely brilliant artist and I have bugged my editors for an opportunity to work with him. When the original artist had to drop out, again I dropped Ricardo's name to take it over."

But he can't get Orgo off his mind.

"Despite the fact that he's this squat muscly monster guy who looks like he could juggle Mack trucks, his power was super-hypnosis. He invaded a circus and hypnotized the entire world. Then he went to sleep at the foot of a tree and a hungry gorilla who was too stupid to be hypnotized beat Orgo over the head and Orgo died and the world was freed. You've got to love a story like that."

– Anya Martin

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CONAN

THE ADVENTURER

It's time for **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**, star of hundreds of comics, dozens of novels, and two Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, to die.

That's the only way **CONAN THE ADVENTURER** can be born.

"We did it because we were so excited by the work of Rafael Kayanan," Editor Richard Ashford explained. "Rafael was doing **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN**, and his work was so good that it gave us the idea that perhaps we should be doing more with him — something monthly.

"The question then became: what do we do? Do we start advertising a 'new direction' that will start in issue #276? Or do we take some time and work the whole thing out?"

"*That* would give the artist time to work at his own rate — without being subjected to crushing deadline pressures," Ashford noted. So the new monthly series **CONAN THE ADVENTURER** makes its debut in April.

Rafael Kayanan, whose work has appeared in titles from Michael Moorcock's *Hawkmoon* to *Firestorm*, specializes in realistic action-adventure — the kind of thing that's absolutely essential to Conan. But how does he look at the character, and what are his plans for this *new* Conan?

"I want to stay away from the sort of 'Hollywood hero' look that recent issues have shown," Kayanan said. "I want to have more of a Samurai-movie feel, that sort of gritty realism."

"[Our] Conan will start as a mid-to-late teenager — maybe 16 years old." Kayanan paused. "Of course, he's still larger than the *usual* 16-year-old — not as big as the John Buscema Conan, but still *big* — closer to the look he had in the very first issue (of **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**). He might change a little bit in physical appearance after that, maybe look the way he did in 'Red Nails.'"

"A lot of the stories will concentrate on the ways he learned his art — how he learned to use various weapons, who his mentors were — even a look at his teachers while he's with his own tribe. That'll let us introduce more visuals on other Cimmerians, something that hasn't been done before.

An ambitious slant, but one that requires either great knowledge — or great research.

Kayanan laughed at the distinction, and with good reason. "Martial arts, especially with edged weaponry *is* one of my hobbies. That makes Conan seem closer to me, lets me put more realism into the book."

"You know, when I go to (martial arts) tournaments and demonstrations here, on the East Coast, I'm known — by martial artists who *don't* read comics. They pick up my Conan and see techniques that look *right*, almost like a training manual. They look at it differently than a regular comic reader would." He chuckled proudly. "It's because I show *real* techniques in the sword and weapons play."

So, a trained master of weapons delineating the greatest master of weapons in fiction. Quite a coup! Editor Ashford elaborated: "Conan has always had a real hard-core audience of people who just *love* the book. However, we have found that even when an issue of the title sells out, comic shops *don't* order more. That made us nervous, unsure that we could increase our audience, even with a new direction.

"Had we continued with the current book," he continued, "we would have had a harder time getting a

Conan artist Rafael Kayanan (left) participating in a martial arts weapons tournament, polishing techniques he also uses in illustrating the adventures of the barbarian hero.

new audience totally excited. Now though, we can go all the way back to year one — to the most important event in young Conan's life — the Battle of Venarium, where, for the first time, the Cimmerian tribes joined together and stormed a Aquilonian fortress. That battle has been referred to in stories many times, but we've never shown it."

"We'll show it now. And we'll start our new series with it."

And who will write this story, this new beginning for Conan? Who else but the man who started it all — Roy Thomas.

"First," writer Thomas stated emphatically, "I want to stress that this will still be *Robert E. Howard's* Conan. The only things we'll 'jazz up' will be the kind of stories we'll do — stories that we think will appeal to modern audiences.

"We're starting with the Battle of Venarium, Conan's first battle, and, as he's only around 15, [it's] his first sight of civilization." Thomas hesitated for a moment. "Of course, Venarium was *kind* of touched on in some young Conan stuff two or three years ago, but it was so far from anything Howard envisioned. . ." He laughed, remembering. "Venarium looked like some super city out of the future, not the wooden or stone-walled fort that it had to be. We decided we *had* to ignore it."

"In this new story, as in Howard's writings, Venarium is basically a fortress outpost that the civilized city-state of Aquilonia has established as a foothold in Cimmeria." Thomas added, chuckling, "You know how that works, it's a first step to eventually taking over the whole country!"

"But here, the scattered and disunited Cimmerian tribes unite to force the invaders out, and then fall to squabbling among themselves." Thomas paused again, then laughed. "You know, I once did a story about the *aftermath* of the battle, but the story of the battle itself has never been told.

"Afterward, there will be a sort of theme that runs through the first year or so of the book. It deals with a quest that Conan is on and a number of people that he meets along the way. It will show various events that happened between Conan stories we've already done — and add a whole new continuity to Conan's life."

Editor Ashford agreed: "The new book starts in a very early period in Conan's life. . .For him, it's a learning period, but, in. . .The Hyborean Age, if you don't learn your lessons quickly and completely, what you don't know *will* kill you!

"That means that, through every second of every adventure, young Conan is fighting for his very existence, and doing so in a new, strange environment. He matures in that environment, at first being conned by those around him, but eventually doing the conning himself. It will give us the sort of action, adventure, and dynamics that we had in the early years of **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**."

And will there be other changes? Will Conan reflect the violence of the nineties in this new book?

"We *did* have a lot of restrictions in the past," writer Thomas pointed out, "between the Comics Code and the general mood of society, but that was almost a quarter century ago. Once upon a time, we used to worry about hitting people with the *flat* of a sword! We had to stab them *off* panel — stupid things like that."

He paused for a second. "That was then — times have changed, and while we're not setting out to make it a violent comic *per se*, there is a certain amount of violence inherent to the characters and period. Rafael's individualistic style and approach to things will give something the modern day readers will appreciate very much, just as they appreciated Barry Smith in the early days."

Editor Ashford agreed: "Conan has *always* been thought of as a violent comic. In terms of what Marvel does, I think of him as the precursor to the Punisher and Wolverine." He laughed. "Think about it — Conan had his blind rages long before Wolverine threw his first berserker rage.

"Basically there's a lot of source material for all the hyper-violence in Conan, but he's been outdone in terms of body count by other characters." He paused. "Frankly, I don't think just escalating violence is a good thing — you've got to have a solid story, you've got to *care* about the characters — otherwise the readers won't care who gets killed or who doesn't get killed."

Asked about the storylines that have been developed and continued for the past 23 years in the now-canceled **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**, Editor Richard Ashford sighed and said, "As an editor, I didn't want to come in and, after just a year on the job, kill a 23-year-old ongoing story! Still, you have to advance — you don't ever want to go backward."

Roy Thomas elaborated: "Starting about a month or two from now, after the final issue of **CONAN THE BARBARIAN** (#275) appears, the continuity that's been going on there, more or less continuously since issue #1, will be moved — it'll become a backup feature of 17-to-20 pages in every issue of **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN**.

"I think that will start in issue #218. The stories will continue to be written by me and have the same penciller, Mike Docherty, and inker E.R. Cruz. That continuity is going to be in just about every issue — once in a while it'll even be the lead feature. We call it our 'Conan the Barbarian' section because it will continue *that* book.

"Normally, though," Thomas continued, "the lead feature will follow the same policy that **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN** has used since I started it in 1974 — stories that jump around throughout Conan's lifetime — one part, two part, or occasionally longer."

Editor Ashford added, "Basically, it was that very continuity that defeated **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**. We'd get into periods of Conan's life that just weren't that interesting — but because there was a sort of progression to the character, a decades-old continuity, you *had* to go through these periods.

"With **CONAN THE ADVENTURER**, the whole Hyborean world is our oyster! We're going to be jumping all over the place, from Shadizar the Wicked, to Zamora, the city of thieves — all the stuff that made **CONAN THE BARBARIAN** the hottest comic of the seventies — but we're going to bring it to the nineties!" he promised.

— Doug Murray

EPICENTER

MOEBIUS #9: STEL

Devotees of the famed French writer/artist Jean Giraud, a.k.a. *Moeblus*, have much to look forward to as Epic releases **MOEBIUS #9: STEL** in May. Written and drawn by Moebius in conjunction with R.J.M. Lofficier, it continues the story begun in **MOEBIUS #5: THE GARDENS OF ADENA**, and follows on the heels of **MOEBIUS #7: THE GODDESS.**

Readers first encountered the character Stel, along with his companion Atana, in **GARDENS.** Stel and Atana "lost their civilized inhibitions and started being like people, instead of the robots they had been trained to be," Editor Marie Javins explained. In **GODDESS,** Atana overthrew the Paternum, the evil force governing the planet Stel and Atana had settled upon. This latest installment of the graphic novel series will detail Stel's struggle against the remaining forces of the Paternum.

SACHS & VIOLENS RETURNS

The remaining issues of the much-lauded four-part Peter David and George Pérez *Heavy Hitters* limited series will be returning to the stands as issue #2 is released in mid-March, preceded by a platinum edition of **SACHS & VIOLENS #1**, limited to 10,000 copies.

"We basically ran into two problems," David said, referring to the series' delayed release. "One was that we ran late with the second issue; the second problem was that the orders for issue #1 were not what we hoped that they would be." The creators had hoped that the sales would reflect those of their previous collaboration, **HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT.** "Instead," David said, "retailers ordered very, *very* conservatively, and from all the reports that we got the comic book virtually blew out of the stores. So not only did people not have enough #1 to go around, but that was absolutely guaranteeing that there would not be anywhere near enough of issue #2 or issue #3."

This led Epic to, in effect, "re-launch" the **SACHS & VIOLENS** series, detailing the exploits of model J.J. Sachs and photographer Ernie "Violens" Schultz, with the platinum edition of #1. And, as Editor Marie Javins pointed out, "there will only be 10,000 of them, so [readers] will have to rush in and buy them really quickly."

Also available are the **SACHS & VIOLENS** trading cards from *Comic Images*, which serialize the first two issues, and perhaps the most exciting off-shoot is the statue of the sexy J.J. Sachs, produced by Randy Bowen Studios (also responsible for the figurines of *Superman* and *Death.)* The run will be limited to 500, and each statue will come with a special piece of art by Pérez, signed by Pérez and David. They will be available directly from *To Be Continued, Inc., PO Box 239, Aport, New York 11705.*

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HELLRAISER SPRING SLAUGHTER: RAZING HELL

This 48-page journey into Clive Barker's Hellraiser universe almost didn't see the light of day.

Originally scheduled to be included in the **CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER** ongoing series, **CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER: RAZING HELL** kept getting bumped from issue to issue, "probably because it was a three-parter — and we had already done a long continuing story with "Devil's Brigade," Editor Tom Daning said. "It was a good story," he added, "so we decided to put it together in a special. People can read it all at once and enjoy it."

RAZING HELL, by Larry Wachowski and Mark Pacella, follows the actions of three individuals as they attempt to rescue the author of a book on the ins and outs of escaping from Hell — who has fallen into the clutches of Leviathan, and to destroy all the "puzzle boxes" which open the gateways to that dark domain.

HELLRAISER SPRING SLAUGHTER: RAZING HELL is slated for the Ides of March.

– Steve Behling

The old saying goes, "Love never dies."

In the year 2099, neither does vengeance.

Straight from the meanest streets of the twenty-first century, **GHOST RIDER 2099** will hit the stands the third week of March. To celebrate the newest arrival from the future, *two* versions of the first issue will be printed: one with holographic foil stamping, priced at $2.00, along with a "frills-free" edition priced at $1.50.

In keeping with the futuristic feel of 2099, readers will be introduced to a new area of the future: the cybernatural. Over the next 100 years, technology will have advanced so quickly that the results will defy reason, explanation, or even proof of existence, effectively replacing the supernatural with the cybernatural. Within a dark, hidden area of the world computer network exists The "Ghostworks."

Populated by individual consciousnesses of people who died while being mentally linked to cyberspace, and of huge, man-made programs that have attained sentience, The Ghostworks is a mysterious element, even within 2099. "The people in general don't believe the Ghostworks exists — kind of like now most people of today don't believe in UFOs — but there's this underlying hope that just maybe they do," **GHOST RIDER 2099** Editor Evan Skolnick noted.

Unfortunately, many powerful *businesses* believe in the Ghostworks and wish to enslave or destroy those within it. Though the Ghostworks entities attempt to hide in Cyberspace, they cannot ignore the dangers of extermination at the hands of conglomerates like Alchemax or Stark-Fujikara. While the digital entities have a difficulty grasping human activity, they see the disastrous effects these companies have had on the "lower classes" — financially, morally, and mentally. "The Ghostworks entities see humanity as a program that's just about to crash," **GHOST RIDER 2099** creator Len Kaminski commented.

To inspire the masses, while still hiding their very existence, the Ghostworks will need an agent. Enter Zero Cochrane, a data pirate in the "Hotwire Martyrs" street gang hacker group. Young and arrogant they make a "data raid." Unfortunately, most members of the gang are killed — including Zero, whose consciousness is immersed in cyberspace at the time of his demise.

One mind in a million can survive within cyberspace following physical death. Zero is offered a chance to be reborn as a physical agent for the Ghostworks, and accepts. Implanted into a "cybernetic warbot" with technology beyond that accessible to even the most sophisticated corporations, Zero fashions a flame around his metallic head in homage to his comrades. Zero seeks vengeance for his and his friends' deaths, but the Ghostworks entities have much more planned for him.

They feel humanity has declined into drones — fodder for corporations like Alchemax. Seeing Zero's rebellious nature as a strength, the Ghostworks hope his battles will lead people to fight back against the grip of the companies. Physically, though, Ghost Rider is very much a robot. "He'll be fighting for humanity," Skolnick said, "even though he'll never be human again."

Although characters such as Spider-Man, are cheered on by hero-fanatic 2099 crowds, Ghost Rider will not share in these accolades. Skolnick pointed out that the public never supported the mysterious Ghost Rider of the present era, so it is doubtful that they would find the *equally* frightening visage of the future Ghost Rider any more appealing. "Because big business controls the media, they'll probably put a bad spin on anything Ghost Rider does," Kaminski added.

In **GHOST RIDER 2099**, readers will also be introduced to Transverse City. "It's adding a whole new piece of the 2099 puzzle that's completely unexplored," noted Matt Morra, assistant editor on the other 2099 titles. Transverse City is located in the midwest United States, somewhere near present-day Detroit, and Ghost Rider's stomping grounds will not be a pretty place.

"It's a mess," Kaminski stated simply. "Economically, it's in ruins . . .it's lawless, like Dodge City in the Old West."

With the new character, location, and era, how does the new Ghost Rider compare to the original? Both are, at least at the outset, motivated by vengeance. Both possess the flaming skull and motorcycle motif, though Midnight Sons Group Editor Bobbie Chase noted that for the new

hero, "it will still be a new look — very identifiable to the [2099] character." She added that the action will be just as hard-hitting as the present Ghost Rider.

Apart from these general attributes, the two have little in common. Unlike Dan Ketch, Zero will still have full control over his mind. "He is humanity forced into a robot," Chase pointed out, "rather than the present-day mystical character, who is forced into humanity." In an even more radical departure, the future Ghost Rider will have *no* connections to the mystical. "The last thing we wanted to do was what everyone would expect, which would be the Spirit of Vengeance rising again in a hundred years," Skolnick noted.

During creation process, both Kaminski and Skolnick were quick to agree on the non-mystical element, right from their first phone conversation regarding the new series. "By the time I hung up the phone I knew exactly what I wanted," Kaminski recalled. "I knew I wanted something with no supernatural in it. . .it would be completely technologically-based."

Kaminski continued, "I don't think dealing with the supernatural works in a futuristic world. There's already a great deal of suspension of disbelief for the reader to handle just with the high tech, let alone magic!"

Finally, the twenty-first century Ghost Rider will be completely constructed of metal, which will appear just as frightening as the modern day character's mystical bones. Although he doesn't wield a chain, the 2099 counterpart will not lack weaponry. Although Skolnick remained secretive as to specifics, he did reveal, "the 'Ghost' in Ghost Rider will be more applicable to *this* Ghost Rider than any previous incarnation."

But Skolnick wanted more than just computers and gadgetry; "I don't like books that don't say anything, that don't have a message," he stated simply. "I could see that Len wanted to use this book to make a commentary on society and technology. His ideas are very solid."

Evan was equally excited about bringing aboard Chris Bachalo, penciler of **X-MEN UNLIMITED**, *Shade*, the acclaimed *Death* limited series, and last year's **GHOST RIDER ANNUAL**, and Mark Buckingham of Marvel UK's **IMMORTALIS** and *Miracleman*, who will provide finishes. Buckingham is no stranger to Bachalo's style, having inked his pencils on *Shade, Death* and the **GHOST RIDER ANNUAL**. Letterer Richard Starkings and colorist Christie Scheele, who also worked on the **GHOST RIDER ANNUAL**, rounded out the reunion. The color separations will be handled by Heroic Age, the team known for their dazzling special effects work on **DOCTOR STRANGE**.

Skolnick finds this to be "the most exciting project I ever worked on. It's a combination of the Midnight Sons and the 2099 titles, leaning *much* more on the 2099 side." In fact, he will be working in tandem with both Bobbie Chase, the Midnight Sons group editor, and Joey Cavalieri, group editor on the 2099 titles.

Skolnick and Kaminski have plunged head-first into the high-tech aspects of the comic and of its publicity. In January, the two posted **GHOST RIDER 2099** covers on a computer information network, allowing those really connected to cyberspace to get the first look at the character. Unfortunately, technology has also worked against the two: Kaminski's computer hard drive had earlier proved user "unfriendly" and refused to relinquish the plot for the first issue, forcing him to pull three all-nighters and rewrite the plot by hand.

Perhaps there was a ghost in the machine.

Mark's REMARKS

That's cool, that sucks — the great dichotomy in the current vernacular of the MTV/Marvel Comics sensations, Beavis and Butt-Head. It's New Year's Day as I write this and I'm ruminating on the subject of newness and oldness, hipness and datedness, and how they relate to coolness and suckiness.

Is "new" necessarily "good" or "cool"? Is "old" necessarily "bad" or "sucky"? Is it necessary to embrace the new or can you be cool by remaining iconoclastic and impervious to style? Let's say I refuse to accept the new year. I mean, what year it is is only an arbitrary label, and 1993 was really cool. Because I haven't seen much of '94 I can only assume it'll suck, so I don't care that everyone else proclaims it 1994, I'm sticking with good ol' 1993.

Okay, probably one of my more absurd examples, but there are categories of things that one can refuse to accept — governed by your particular taste rather than societal consensus. I have friends who get stuck on a certain style of clothing, music, and on catch phrases and refuse to update them. Not me, of course, I'm always up to the minute. (Ahem.)

So are "current" and "trendy" always "cool" while "out of date" and "old fashioned" always suck? This is often what our cultural trendmongers would have us conditioned to think. But isn't it possible to transcend trendiness — be timeless, classic, and ever-fashionable? There are performers who are flavors of the month — the hottest thing going for a few meteoric minutes then poof, obscure trivia — and there are performers like the Rolling Stones who manage to stay popular for decade.

How do you achieve coolness with staying power when cool goes out of date so quickly?

Like the current music industry, the comics industry is oriented primarily toward a youthful market. Survival depends on the ability to reach your audience and keep them entertained. Marvel's editorial management, myself included, got into the business while in our mid-20s and reached our current positions in the organization by dint of experience, among other things. The problem is the older and more experienced we get, the farther away from our target audience we move. We've got to make an effort to keep our tastes current.

Gruenwald's maxim: The amount of effort it takes to stay hip increases in direct proportion to each year one lives past 30. I regularly try to gauge how out of it I am, with what aspect of contemporary pop culture I'm attuned, and with what I'm out of sync.

Which brings us to the current popular culture litmus test: Beavis and Butt-Head. I've seen it a few times and I get what it's about — it's the latest version of the male buddy bonding thing that's enjoyed a rich tradition in lit and cinema: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, George and Lenny, Abbott and Costello, Tom and Jerry, Wayne and Garth. B&B's contribution seems to be that they've been simplified, distilled, and dumbed-down to the low level our current culture seems to demand. My problem with B&B goes beyond not liking the particular substrata of rock they glorify, and goes past their being such egregious role models. At the risk of sounding hopelessly out of it, I don't find this dumbed down humor quite as interesting as I would like.

There are a lot of different styles of humor. Some gets its bite from exaggeration for satirical effect. I think the portrayal of the Beavis and Butt-Head is too unexaggerated, too accurate a reflection of a certain segment of disaffected white middle class youth today. Then maybe B&B represents humor derived from keenly observed lifelike characters presented so accurately you get the shock of recognition. Perhaps. But that only works if you find the accurately presented behavior intrinsically amusing. Which in this case I rarely do. There's also the humor of outrageousness, a category under which B&B definitely qualify, but outrageousness for its own sake has its limits.

I guess it's Beavis and Butt-Head's glorification of dumbness that I find less than sidesplitting. One can make smart comedies about smart people (Woody Allen in Play It Again Sam), smart comedies about dumb people (The Simpsons), dumb comedies about smart people (The Professor on Gilligan's Island), and finally dumb comedies about dumb people (B&B). This is not to say B&B creator Mike Judge, is not smart — I think it took a lot of smarts to distill white middle class youth into stylized archetypes, and to dumb down everything so thoroughly that they betray not an iota of smartness. But, unlike a previous generation's Three

Stooges, idiots trying to better themselves, B&B enjoy how tasteless and idiotic they are. The Simpsons are ironic about their dumbness, B&B are sincere about it.

As far as comedy is concerned, sincerity sucks. In my opinion.

So if Beavis and Butt-Head are the litmus test of coolness, I'm flunking. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying B&B is without value or represents the fall of western civilization. Far from it. I'm saying that, while I understand B&B, I don't relate to it any more than I do to Barney the Dinosaur. Every generation needs figures embodying and evoking the values of its audience. B&B seems to have done that. And any show that gets so many establishment types bent out of shape has to have redeeming value.

Wait a minute, I implied there was no irony to Beavis and Butt-Head. Amend that. There is irony, perhaps unintentionally. What B&B find cool are anti-establishment, countercultural, anti-social things (headbanger music, destruction of property, etc.). What they find sucky are popular, mainstream things. The irony is that B&B have become popular and mainstream themselves.

So is something cool because it's popular, or is something cool because it's unpopular? The word "cool" originated in the jazz and beat cultures, where certain antisocial tendencies were considered desirable and when "cool" definitely had an anti-popular connotation. When the rock culture co-opted "cool" ("groovy" didn't have staying power), there was still a countercultural ring to it. Then in the '70s, rock became big business. But it was still rock, the music of youth, so it was still considered cool. Thus, "cool" hit the mainstream where it has remained for almost two decades.

Paradoxically, what's "cool" is what's "hot" and, in this rapidly transforming culture, things stay hot for ever briefer amounts of time.

When it comes to comic books, the super hero genre comprises at least 80% of what's being produced. Then super heroes, as the most popular genre must be cool. Obviously some characters are cooler (more popular) than others and the same goes for storytelling styles. Sales figures inform us what are the most popular characters, but they don't tell us why. When it comes time to add more books to our publishing program, it is hard to predict what is going to catch on.

Newness alone won't do it. New characters must have that indescribable something that makes them capture the audience imaginations. While there is nothing new under the sun, there are a million different elements available and more than a million different ways to connect them.

As one who has some say in what Marvel publishes, I make an effort to keep my tastes well-sharpened on the lathe of popular culture. But, as my experience with B&B would attest, try as I might, I can't relate to everything. So should I be put out to pasture and be replaced by someone with hipper tastes? Is it impossible for a forty-year-old to know what a fifteen-year-old would find cool? Stan Lee was in his forties when he co-created the then-radical, now-classic characters of the Marvel Universe, and those characters, as hip as super heroes could be, have proven to be of enduring popularity. So, maybe there is hope for someone of my advanced age to remain relevant at least for a few more years. At least I am trying to keep up and, on occasion, I figure I am in tune with popular tastes. Some of my contemporaries (and they know who they are) don't even make the effort, and that's worse than trying and falling flat on your pop cultural face.

There is a bewildering plethora of media experiences to choose from. You can't experience everything — no one has the time or financial resources to do that. You must make choices based on experience and taste. You also can't like everything that you experience and must make choices by means of your taste biases and your individual entertainment requirements.

Furthermore, if you choose solely on the basis of what's popular (or "cool") you are going to find yourself the most average person in the world — there won't be any quirky individuality to your tastes or to the cultural repository that's inside you.

So, hey, maybe it's okay not to love B&B just this once. After all, nothing stays cool forever. Except coolness itself.

— *Mark Gruenwald*

Stan's SOAP BOX

Hi Heroes!

We referred to them as "split books" in those days.

No, we didn't cut them in two with knives, though that's not a bad idea. What we did was, we featured two separate stories, starring two separate super heroes in each issue.

The names of the mags were **STRANGE TALES**, **TALES OF SUSPENSE** and **TALES TO ASTONISH**. We might have published even more split books, but alas, we ran out of descriptive titles.

Personally, I loved editing those three mags because they presented such a challenge. Whereas our other superhero titles had feature-length stories running anywhere from 20 to 25 pages, our three "splitties" only had room for a pair of ten-page yarns per ish and, if you've ever tried to tell an exciting, Marvel-type action story in only ten pages, you'll realize how difficult the job was. But the greatest challenge came from the characters themselves. For example. . .

TALES TO ASTONISH had Ant Man as the featured strip. Soon thereafter, ol' Henry Pym metamorphosed from Ant Man to Giant Man. Then, it became a split book when the Incredible Hulk was added to the mix.[1] So T.T.A. was a Hulk/Giant Man title — until Giant Man retired and the Sub-Mariner replaced him.[2] Getting dizzy yet? Me too, so let's move on...

In the early days of **STRANGE TALES**, The Human Torch was the featured do-gooder. After a while, we added a separate series starring Dr. Strange, the Master of the Mystic Arts.[3] So, once again Marveldom had a split mag to reckon with. Then, for reasons which I've long since forgotten, the flaming one was replaced by Nick Fury, Agent of Shield[4] — and the rest is history!

Y'know, we made quite a few attempts to revive **STRANGE TALES** since the early '70s. We tossed in almost every feature imaginable, such as Warlock and Brother Voodoo, but to no avail. Then in the eighties we brought back Dr. Strange in company with Cloak and Dagger, but before long, our very own Sorcerer Supreme was safely back at home in his own **DR. STRANGE** title.

Of course, no erudite essay such as this would be complete without a celebratory mention of **TALES OF SUSPENSE**! Just to further confuse you, T.O.S. was the literary vehicle for Iron Man, and also presented an unforgettable saga of the Watcher for a while.[5] Then another hero made the scene when Captain America began to share the mag with Tony Stark's greatest creation![6] At least, I *think* that's how it happened. Hey, it was more than thirty years ago!

(As a matter of fact, in case you didn't know, if you go back even further all three titles — **ASTONISH**, **STRANGE**, and **SUSPENSE** — were originally *monster* mags before we saw the light and switched to super hero doings!)

As difficult as it was to do those split issues, I must admit I enjoyed working on them. One of the biggest challenges was figuring out how to do the covers. Should we feature one of our star superheroes on the cover, or both? If both, which character should be drawn more prominently? Should we split the cover design horizontally or vertically? And, where would we find room for two heroes, two heart-pounding danger-filled scenes, and two titles and blurbs — all on one cover?

And the two-for-one mags served as a great training ground for new artists. Since the stories were only 10 pages long, we could have them drawn by your younger, less experienced artists — sort of like interning before opening your own medical practice!

Come to think of it, maybe we should revive those titles again, perhaps featuring *three* stories per book! You'd get more variety and more stories per ish. In fact, maybe four stories per mag, or five — or, in the words of that great comicbook mavin, Irving Forbush — "Festina lente!"

Excelsior!

Stan

— Stan Lee

FOOTNOTES

TALES TO ASTONISH #60
TALES TO ASTONISH #70
STRANGE TALES #110
STRANGE TALES #135
TALES OF SUSPENSE #49
TALES OF SUSPENSE #50

STRANGE TALES
130
MAR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THE DEFEAT OF DR. STRANGE!
A TALE SO DIFFERENT, SO UNEXPECTED, THAT WE JUST HAD TO GIVE IT THE FEATURE COVER SPOT THIS ISSUE!
HOW OFF-BEAT CAN YOU GET??
Dare Dare Miss THE HUMAN TORCH
and
THE EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED THING WHEN THEY...
"MEET... The BEATLES!"

CLAWS AND EFFECT

LETTERS

Send your letters to: MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE, c/o Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016.

Attention, correspondents: All letters to be considered for publication must include your complete name and address, though we will gladly withhold that info on request!

This month's genetically-enhanced letter column title is the mutant offspring of Brian Corvello of Washington, CT. Thanks, Brian! Best of all, Brian's title fits perfectly with the subject of a whole mess of our recent mail: Mutants, mutants, mutants!

Of course, if the rest of you have ideas for equally spiffy titles for this column, we still want you to send 'em in! We need a new one every month, and if we use yours, we'll even thank you right here in black and white. And future generations? They might even build a statue of you.

Dear Stirs,

I'm sure many other X-fans have asked why Rogue doesn't use a mutant power inhibitor similar to Iceman's to control her power. In a future **X-MEN ANNUAL** or **X-MEN UNLIMITED**, please write a flashback story that shows Professor X taking one of the inhibitor collars donated to the X-Men by the Hellfire Club in issue #152, testing it on Rogue, and being dissatisfied with the results. Remember to use Rogue's old costume and hair style. Could you do the art in the same style as issue #171?

James Leatham
Rd. 2, Box 198
Chesterny, NY 10918

Good question, James. In fact, your letter was the first one we've seen that raised this point, so we took it to one of the X-perts — namely, X-MEN Associate Editor Lisa Patrick. Lisa hypothesized that the reason that the X-Men haven't used an inhibitor collar on Rogue is simply that they haven't found one that works on her yet. Apparently, Iceman's collar only works for his particular physiology.

Still, an inhibitor collar is an awfully interesting idea. . .Hmm. . .

Speaking of interesting, it's time for our LETTER OF THE MONTH, the letter that we think will be of particular interest to Marvelites far and wide! This month we've chosen two letters, because each focuses on the same topic. In fact, it's almost as though one of them's a reprint. . .

Dear MARVEL AGE,

Could you give me some information as to what **MARVEL MASTERWORKS** are planned for this year?

Will the **MASTERWORKS'** range eventually include the original Astonishing Ant-Man/Giant-Man stories from **TALES TO ASTONISH** and the Human Torch solo adventures from **STRANGE TALES**? They are as important to the development of the Marvel mythos as Spidey and the X-Men.

When will you be reprinting the Daredevil **MASTERWORKS**? I missed it the first time around.

HERE COMES...
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
SPIDER-MAN
NOW WE CONTINUE THE MARVEL TRADITION WITH... DAREDEVIL!!
A WORTHY COMPANION MAGAZINE TO SUCH ALL-TIME GREATS AS THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN! FANTASTIC FOUR!
IN THIS ISSUE YOU WILL MEET
ORDRICK
GORGEL
KAREN PAGE!
CAN YOU GUESS WHY DAREDEVIL IS DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER CRIME-FIGHTERS...?

As you can see, I can't get enough of your excellent **MASTERWORKS** series and hope it will be around for a very long time. Until then (and maybe after), make mine Marvel!

Andrew J. Ramsey
3 Sherwood Dr.
Bebington, Merseyside
England L63 8LA

Dear Sirs,

How do I say this? I'm not a full-blown comic book fan, at least not yet. But then, since most comic book characters are new to me, I have the curiosity of a small child who has just begun to read and realizes that there is a whole new universe waiting to be explored. It all began when I happened to see **THE X-MEN** on Fox. Now, I'm not totally naive about these homo superiors who are the focus of the comic books, but I know almost nothing when it comes to their past, such as how or why they became who they are today. After watching a few episodes of **THE X-MEN**, I began to inquire of one of my friends about certain mutants' pasts, etc. He was the Fountain of Knowledge I had been searching for. My thirst not quenched, I purchased Volumes 3 and 4 of **MARVEL MASTERPIECES**. (Is there a way to order Volumes 1 and 2? If so, let me know. I would like to order them.) At least half the characters featured in **MARVEL MASTERPIECES** were new to me.

If there is a purpose to this letter, let this be it: Thanks to the Fox Television Network and a good friend of mine, you now have yet another follower who wishes to learn everything he can about these mutants, their pasts, and their reasons for who they are.

Nathan James
229 Hinterland Dr.
Jackson, MO 63755

Welcome aboard, Nathan! Hope you stick around for a while. As you've already discovered, one of the best ways to learn about the origins of our merry mutants is through the classic stories reprinted in the hardcover MARVEL MASTERWORKS. Volumes 3 and 7 focus on the original team of X-Men (Cyclops, Marvel Girl/Jean Grey, Iceman, the Beast, and the Angel), while volumes 11 and 12 reprint the earliest adventures of the later group (Wolverine, Storm, and the rest). The remaining volumes showcase other Marvel stalwarts, such as Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four, and the Avengers.

Unfortunately for Andrew (and, we confess, ourselves), MASTERWORKS Editor Tom Brevoort tells us that the series is currently on hold until the demand for new volumes picks up again. In the meantime, though, there are still ways for you to own classic Marvel stories without mortgaging the house. Our trade paperback reprints are alive and well, as are the magazine-format MARVEL MILESTONE editions. Neo-X-fans like Nathan will also be interested to know that, in addition to X-MEN CLASSIC, there will soon be two other X-series of reprints. X-MEN:

THE EARLY YEARS will feature the adventures of the original X-Men in comic book format, while SABRE-TOOTH CLASSICS will re-present vintage tales of everyone's favorite homicidal homo superior.

Incidentally, Andrew, Tom suggested that if you check around various comics specialty shops, you should still be able to find a copy of the Daredevil MASTERWORKS volume. If you can't, ask your retailer to check into it. Reader demand is the single best way to get the series back on track, or at least bring old volumes back into print.

And while we wait for our flurry of responses, let's pull out our secret decoder badges and decipher a message from one of our favorite Wild Agents of Marvel in our monthly. . .

Remember: To be a WAMmer Jammer yourself, write to us on official WAM stationery or include your WAM I.D. number in your letter. And don't forget to make sure you're not being followed!

Dear WAM,

I am not a member of **WAM**, but I want to be. But I don't know how to enter, so if you would, please send me details on how to become a **WAM** Agent. So would you please send me something because I really want to be a **WAM** Agent.

Adam Kaiser
4053 Stinson Road
Herron, MI 49744

And we really want to have you, Adam! We're going to have to wait just a little longer, though. As we mentioned a couple of months back, WAM is currently undergoing top-secret renovation. However, Official WAM Guy Paul Curtis read your letter and asked us to pass along his reply:

Dear Adam,

A lot of people have been wondering the same thing: how to join **WAM**. As a matter of fact, we've stopped adding members until we are ready to with the new, improved Wild Agents of Marvel, which we will launch in 1994. It's going to be pretty exciting because Stan (The Man) Lee himself has been helping to think up great new ideas that we'll try out on old and new members alike.

And you have already taken the most important step in becoming a new Agent: letting me know your name and address! Now that your request is on file with **WAM**, we will send you all you need to know, as soon as we're ready with **WAM '94**.

Paul

checklist

GUEST APPEARANCES

CAPTAIN AMERICA #427 1.50
Quicksilver

EXCALIBUR #77 1.95
Captain Britain

GHOST RIDER #49 1.95
The Hulk

IRON MAN #304 1.50
The Hulk

MORBIUS #21 1.95
Spider-Man

NIGHT THRASHER #10 1.95
Iron Man

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #5 3.95
Human Torch

WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH #28 1.95
Thunderstrike, Captain America, Hercules

WOLVERINE #81 1.95
Nightcrawler & Kitty Pryde

FIRST WEEK

THE ADVENTURES OF CYCLOPS AND PHOENIX #1 (of 4) 2.95

CABLE #11 2.00

CAPTAIN AMERICA #427 1.50

CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL #13 2.95

CLIVE BARKER'S PINHEAD #6 2.50
Pinhead battles the Hulking Aggregate.

DAREDEVIL #328 1.50

DAREDEVIL: FALL FROM GRACE TPB 19.95

DARKHAWK #39 1.50
"Amulet Quest" part 2 (of 4).

FORCE WORKS #3 1.50
The Scatter aliens attack Texas.

GROO THE WANDERER #112 2.25
Groo is transformed into an animal.

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #153 1.75
Tales of Vengeance, Moon Knight, War Machine, and Wolverine.

NAMOR #50 1.75
The standard version

NAMOR #50 2.95
The deluxe version

NOMAD #25 1.75
"American Dreamers" finale

REN & STIMPY #18 1.95
The guys join the army.

SPIDER-MAN 2099 #19 1.50

SPIDER-MAN CLASSIC #14 1.25
The first appearance of Mysterio

SPIDER-MAN MAGAZINE #2 1.95

SPIDER-MAN: MUTANT AGENDA #3 (of 3) 1.75

UNCANNY X-MEN #312 1.50
The return of Yukio

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #112 1.50

WILD ANGELS #3 (of 4) 1.95
Wild Thing and Dark Angel battle Mendes.

CROSSOVERS

PURSUIT

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #389 1.50
Part 4 of 4: Spidey discovers his true foe.

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #112 1.50
Part 3 of 4: Spidey closes in on the Chameleon.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

NEW WARRIORS #47 1.50
Beginning the Warriors, Night Thrasher, Nova epic.

SECOND WEEK

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #389 1.50

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #28 2.95

BARBIE #41 1.25

CONAN SAGA #86 2.25
Conan, Red Sonja and King Kull seek the Book of Skelos.

DEATH'S HEAD II/KILLPOWER: BATTLETIDE III #4 (of 4) 1.95
The fate of reality itself hangs in the balance.

GHOST RIDER #49 1.95

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #48 1.50

HARROWERS #6 2.50

HYPERKIND #9 1.95
The team faces Laxarex Prime.

LOOSE CANNONS #3 (of 4) 2.75
One of the all-female team's infected with a virus. *Fully painted*

NIGHT THRASHER #10 1.95

NOVA #5 1.95
Debuting the new Condor

PUNISHER WAR ZONE #27 1.95
"Conan With a Gun" part 2

QUASAR #58 1.25
Quasar reunites with Makkari

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Paul-Phillip is thrown into a mental asylum.

SACHS & VIOLENS #2 (of 4) 2.25
J.J. battles snuff pornographers

SECRET DEFENDERS #15 1.95
Thanos is the new leader of the team!

THE SHROUD #3 (of 4) 1.75

SILVER SABLE #24 1.50
Will Dimitri assassinate Sable?

WAR MACHINE #2 1.50
War Machine battles a North African dictator.

WOLVERINE #81 1.95

WONDER MAN #32 1.25

X-FACTOR #102 1.50
Havok leaves the team.

X-MEN ADVENTURES: SEASON II #4 1.50
Cessonia's family is in peril.

X-MEN: THE EARLY YEARS #1 1.50
A new series representing the beginning of a legend

THIRD WEEK

AVENGERS #374 1.50
The Vision is M.I.A.

BEAVIS & BUTT-HEAD #3 1.95
Fast food will never be the same.

BRATS BIZARRE #1 (of 4) 2.50

COSMIC POWERS #3 (of 6) 2.50
Jack of Hearts learns startling things about Ganymede.

DARK GUARD GOLD: OLD FRIENDS 2.95

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ECTO KID #9 1.95
Dex must stop Expurgatorious.

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GHOST RIDER 2099 #1 2.00

G.I. JOE #148 1.25
Dr. Mindbender vs. COBRA

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INCREDIBLE HULK #417 1.50
Rick Jones's bachelor party

KILLFRENZY #2 (of 4) 1.95
A crazed killfrenzy converges on Castle Madspike.

MARVEL AGE #136 1.25

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #154 1.75

MARVEL TALES #285 1.25
Peter Parker wants revenge on the Kingpin.

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MOTORMOUTH: RE-MIX #1 (of 4) 1.95

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Caught in a drug war

REN & STIMPY TPB: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME 12.95

SABRETOOTH CLASSICS #1 1.50

SPIDER-MAN #46 1.95
Hobgoblin threatens to kill Spidey.

THUNDERSTRIKE #8 1.50
Introducing Officer Z.E.R.O.

TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION 2 #7 1.75
Megatron is defeated in battle.

WARLOCK & THE INFINITY WATCH #28 1.95

WHAT IF? #61 1.50

X-FACTOR ANNUAL #9 2.95

X-MEN #32 1.50
Psylocke vs. Spiral. Nuff said!

X-MEN 2099 #8 1.50

MARK IT SPOTLIGHT

DAREDEVIL: FALL FROM GRACE TPB 19.95
Re-presenting the *pivotal* storyline in 208 pages. *"This is the most talked about Daredevil storyline since 'Fall Of the Kingpin' and it's going to be the best trade paperback ever."* —Assistant Editor Pat Garrahy

DARK GUARD GOLD: OLD FRIENDS 2.95
A 64-page team-up of Death's Head, Motormouth, Warheads and more, with art by Carlos Pacheco. *"I always enjoy team-ups and this looks to be a good one."*—Assistant Editor Lia Peloni

GHOST RIDER 2099 #1 $2.00
The spirit of vengeance makes his debut—2099-style, and cyberspace will never again be the same.

HELLRAISER SPRING SLAUGHTER: RAZING HELL 6.95
Three new tales of hell in 48-pages. *"This collection includes some of the most fan-favorite creators to ever do Hellraiser stories, including Mark (X-FORCE) Pacella."*—Editor Tom Daning

MOTORMOUTH: RE-MIX #1 (of 4) 1.95
Alternate-reality tales of a psychotic Spider-Man & a pacifist Punisher, also featuring the Fantastic Four. Pencils by Carlos Pacheco

NAMOR #50 2.95
Featuring 48-pages and a wraparound, transparent ink cover. *"The Geoff Isherwood cover is incredile. This guy is so good I hope the competition doesn't try to steal him!"* —Assistant Editor Joe Andreani

REN & STIMPY TPB: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME 12.95
This 96-pager re-presents issues #9-#12. *"Classic tales of Ren & Stimpy are complimented by brand-new material by Dan Slott and Mike Kazaleh offering behind the scene glimpses of our cat and dog team."*—Editor Mike Lackey

SPIDER-MAN MAGAZINE #2 1.95
A glossy 64-pages of learning and excitement. *"Working with John Romita is a dream come true. His Spidey stuff is some of the best he's done in years."* —Writer Joey Cavalieri

MATCHES OF THE MONTH

CABLE #11 2.00
Cable and The Acolytes vs. Omega Red

GHOST RIDER & BLAZE: SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE #22 1.95
Blaze and Spider-Man vs. Cardiac

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #48 1.50
The Guardians vs. Mephisto and Malevolence

HOKUM & HEX #9 1.95
Trip vs. Bloodshed

HARROWERS #6 2.50
The Harrowers vs. Pinhead

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Shroud vs. the Cult of Kali

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THOR #474 1.50
Thor vs. the Flame

PREMIERS

THE ADVENTURES OF CYCLOPS & PHOENIX #1 (of 4) 2.95
The newlyweds time-travel to the future.

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Introducing an all-new team of super heroes

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The future's hardest-hitting her arrives.

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Alternate-reality tales of a murdering Spider-Man and a cleric Punisher

SABRETOOTH CLASSICS #1 1.50
Re-presenting the villain/hero's first appearance

SPIDER-MAN/X-FACTOR: SHADOWGAMES #1 (of 3) 1.95
Spidey & the mutants battle a group of mutated villains.

VENOM: THE MACE #1 (of 3) 2.95
Venom faces the techno-ninja known as Mace.

X-MEN: THE EARLY YEARS #1 1.50
Re-presenting UNCANNY X-MEN #1

FIFTH WEEK

ALAN DAVIS'S THE CLANDESTINE #3 (of 4) 1.95
Two new members join the team.

BARBIE FASHION #41 1.25

DR. STRANGE #65 1.95
"Strangers Among Us" part 2 (of 4)

FANTASTIC FOUR #388 1.50
The FF time-travel to hunt down Franklin.

GHOST RIDER & BLAZE: SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE #22 1.95

IRON MAN #304 1.50

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #155 1.75
With new tales of Hawkeye and Phantome

NEW WARRIORS ANNUAL #4 2.95

NIGHTWATCH #2 1.50
Nightwatch battles Flashpoint the Radioactive Man

OFFICIAL INDEX TO THE X-MEN #2 (of 5) 1.95
Indexing issues #52-122 of UNCANNY X-MEN.

PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #66 1.95
"Pariah" part 2

SILVER SURFER #92 1.50
Someone is plotting the Surfer's death.

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #5 3.95

SPIDER-MAN/X-FACTOR: SHADOWGAMES #1 (of 3) 1.95

THOR #474 1.50

X-MEN CLASSIC #95 1.25
The X-Men and The Avengers battle the New Mutants.

FOURTH WEEK

DAREDEVIL ANNUAL #10 2.95

DEATH'S HEAD II #18 1.95
Caught in a Martian turf-war

DOCTOR WHO CLASSIC COMICS #17 4.95
The fourth Doctor faces the Daleks.

HELLSTORM #14 2.00
Hellstorm battles the serial killer Zahgurim.

HOKUM & HEX #9 1.95

MARVELS #4 (of 4) 5.95
Is Spider-Man a menace to society? *Fully painted*

NEW WARRIORS #47 1.50
"Tima and Time Again" part 1 (of 4).

NORTHSTAR #2 (of 4) 1.75
Guest-starring Alpha Flight's Heather Hudson

PUNISHER 2099 #16 1.50
Jake gets a cybernetic hand.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #221 2.25
Conan is magically transformed into a wolf.

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #212 1.50
Spidey is attacked by the Master of Vengeance.

VENOM: THE MACE #1 (of 3) 2.95

WILLIAM SHATNER'S TEK WORLD #21 1.75
"Sims Of The Father" part 3

X-FORCE #34 1.50
Rictor hears disturbing news about his father.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
CLASSIC CLASH #3 **WOLVERINE vs. PUNISHER** **PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #6-7**		HAPPY BIRTHDAY TOM ORZECHOWSKI 1	2	GENE DURANTE 3	LORETTA PENNISE MARGUARITE PETERS 4	MONICA BROWN 5
AL MILGROM 6	RUTH RIPLEY 7	JAMES HOSTON 8	DELAYNE HAWKINS 9			
	MIKE DeCARLO 14	BOB BUDIANSKY CAREY BROWN OLIVER AURIOL 15	FRANK MAY 16	BRIAN MITCHELL BETH BEDOYA VINCE EVANS FLO STEINBERG 17 ST. PATRICK'S DAY	BILL REINHOLD 18	19
DIANA ALBERS 20	AL WILLIAMSON 21	PETER COOPER STEPHANIE HALLBERG 22	CHRISTINE AURILIA LINDA VERDUN 23	24	25	CORA ZABOLY 26
JOHN TADDEO 27	28	VAL MAYERIK 29	MATT RAGONE 30	ERICKA MITCHELL 31		

MARVEL Age 135
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